

Chet Williamson | Tim Sullivan | Roberta Lannes

INIQUITIES

The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder

Clive
Barker

Fiction, plus original art!

David J.
Schow

New Novella

John Shirley

Excerpt

Richard
Matheson

Resurrected

John Skipp

Interview

Autumn, 1990

Vol. 1 No. 1

\$4.95 US

Premiere Issue!



ISAAC
ASIMOV's
SCIENCE FICTION
MAGAZINE

THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.



**SUBSCRIBE NOW
AND SAVE 35% OFF THE BASIC PRICE**

- ☐ Please send me 18 issues of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE for only \$26.95—I save 35% off the basic price.
- ☐ Please send me 12 issues of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine for only \$19.95.

Mail to: **Isaac Asimov's**
P.O. Box 7057
Red Oak, IA 51591

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

OR CALL 1-800-333-4108

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge
(Circle one)



Card# _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

MAAN-2

Outside US & POSS., 12 for \$22.95, 18 for \$31.95 (Cash with order US funds). Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

INIQUITIES

The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder

CONTENTS

ENTROPY SPECTRUM

FICTION

Pitt Night at the Lewistone Boneyard	David J. Schow	Pg. 8
His Two Wives	Chet Williamson	Pg. 30
Midnight Glider	Tim Sullivan	Pg. 42
The Yattering And Jack	Clive Barker	Pg. 56
Apostate In Denim	Roberta Lannes	Pg. 74
Reward And Punishment, Ha Ha	John Shirley	Pg. 90

Neue Regel

FEATURES

Interview: Inside John Skipp	Buddy Martinez	Pg. 25
Dead Bodies, Hot Babes, and Horror	Lisa M. Feerick	Pg. 51

CHRONIC

DEPARTMENTS

Shadowlands News, Updates	Bill Furtado	Pg. 6
Opus Book Reviews	Ed Bryant	Pg. 38
In The Dark Movie Reviews	Bill Warren	Pg. 70
Resurrections	Edited By	
Richard Matheson's "Witch War"	George Clayton Johnson	Pg. 86
Irrational Inquiries <i>Humor</i>	Edited By Buddy Martinez	Pg. 101
A Certain Slant of "I"	S. P. Somtow	Pg. 106

Cover Art By: Alan M. Clark
 Iniquities logo designed by: Arnie Fenner
 Parchment screen for "Resurrections" designed by:
 Arnie Fenner
 Book and movie review illustrations by: David Brian
 Wickednotes illustration by: Clive Barker
 Hand lettering for "Pitt Night" and "Yattering" by:
 M. N. Singh
 Photos are as credited

The editors wish to thank the following people without whom the dream would not be reality: Jesus F. and Glenda Gonzalez; Patricia Gonzalez; Susan, Nicole, and Robert Furtado; Holly Martinez and Damien Martinez who has just arrived; Clive Barker (more thanks than one could possibly imagine); George Clayton Johnson (thanks for the great ideas and input George); Peter Straub; David J. Schow (thanks for nagging Dave); John Skipp; Craig Spector (thanks for the by-line Craig); Joe R. Lansdale; Steven R. Boyett; Richard Christian Matheson; S.P. Somtow; Dennis Etchison; Tim Sullivan; Allen M. Clark; Arnie Fenner; Edmund Chan; and more thanks to: Perry Martinez; Joyce and Marcelo Martinez; John and Harry Graff; Chris Lacher; Jessie Horsting; Mark Zeising; Janet Fox; Chris Etchison; Mick Lennartson at Computer Discount Plus; and many more too numerous to mention. THANKS!

Copyright Notice:

The Yattering and Jack: Reprinted by arrangement with the Berkley Publishing Group, one time non-exclusive rights obtained. © 1984 by Clive Barker
Witch War: Reprinted by arrangement with Dos Congdes and Associates, one time non-exclusive rights obtained. © 1951 by Richard Matheson
Pitt Night at the Lovestone Boneyard © 1969 by David J. Schow
His Two Wives © 1989 by Chet Williamson
Midnight Elder © 1989 by Tim Sullivan
Apostate In Desires © 1989 by Roberts Lasaca
Reward and Punishment, Ha Ha © 1989 by John Shirley

Iniquities: The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder, (ISSN # 1050-0632) Autumn 1990, Volume 1, Number 1, is published quarterly. *Iniquities* is published by Iniquities Publications, 167 N. Sierra Bonita Ave. Pasadena, CA 91106, all rights reserved. S.A.S.E. must accompany all (solicited or unsolicited) materials submitted to *Iniquities*. *Iniquities* obtains first North American serial rights and non-exclusive international rights, unless otherwise specified. All letters sent to *Iniquities* Magazine or its editors, are assumed intended for publication. Nothing of *Iniquities* contents may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission by the publishers or copyright obtainee, all contractual agreements applied. Any similarity between persons appearing in fiction and real persons living or dead is coincidental. Single copies \$4.95 US currency. Subscriptions \$19.95 US currency. Postmaster: send address changes to *Iniquities: The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder*, 167 N. Sierra Bonita Ave. Pasadena, CA 91106.

INQUIITIES

The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder

Published By
 Iniquities Publications

Buddy Martinez
 Bill Furtado
 J.F. Gonzalez

Editor-In-Chief
 Buddy Martinez

Associate Editor
 Bill Furtado

Managing Editor
 J.F. Gonzalez

Contributing Editors
 George Clayton Johnson
 Bill Warren
 Ed Bryant
 Lisa M. Feerick

Design/Formatting
 Buddy Martinez
Art Director
 Bill Furtado
Production
 Buddy Martinez
 John Graff
Office Assistant
 Patricia Gonzalez
Controller
 Bill Furtado

Advertising/Advertising Sales
Circulation/Distribution
Newsstand sales
Contact: Iniquities Publications
 167 N. Sierra Bonita Ave.
 Pasadena, CA 91106
 (818)792-1763

WICKEDNOTES

When we first came up with the ungodly idea of starting a magazine, we had no idea we were in store for a round of self torture and humiliation. It's been a long and treacherous road, but we've finally made it to the end, or just the beginning. So here it is.

But enough complaining. You've waited long enough for this magazine and we're sure you don't want to hear three guys whining about the extreme levels of pain we went through to produce this magazine. We've been threatened, made fun of, lost in the eyes of hope of many, but we persisted (like fools).

But enough complaining. We have been to hell and back to bring you the best possible horror fiction, columns, interviews, reviews, artwork and editorials that any magazine has to offer. You couldn't imagine the shit we've had to put up with from major publishers, artists, writers, and distributors. The concept of Iniquities was easy; the groundwork and legalization of this whole mess was a downright bitch!

But enough complaining. We only want to publish a new and exciting magazine with the concept of mixing all styles of horror, i.e. Loud Horror, Quiet Horror, Contemporary Horror and Surreal Horror. We received mixed comments on this approach; some said it was a great idea and others said it sucked. We say it'll work. So don't argue with us. We've put up with enough shit already. *Hey, we come from the old school. If you're gonna beat us up, you're gonna have to hurt us. And remember, while you're getting a meal, we'll be getting a sandwich.* You can quote us on that.

But enough complaining. We believe horror fiction needs no cubicles placed around each of its different approaches. Horror is horror, pure and simple. We ask that our readers try to get a grasp on this line of thinking. If you can't...alright, just don't send us



many letters complaining about the things you don't like. There are people who like what you don't. That's what we're doing: catering to all of our readers by putting a splash of everything in the magazine. Look, we're sick and tired of the bickering between those that love quiet and those that love loud. Don't get us stuck in the middle of the din. We don't want to hear it.

But enough complaining. Just read and judge for yourself. We stand by our convictions and will die for them. And one last word to those who didn't believe or stopped believing: HA!

But enough complaining.

The Editors



Bill Furtado



Buddy Martinez



J.F. Gonzalez

NEWS AND UPDATES

SHADOWLANDS

By
Bill Furtado

Hello...and welcome to Shadowlands. This department is going to guide you down the trails of new books, convention news, movies, and general information you should all be aware of. It is our highest hope that you will be inclined to venture down this path with us issue after issue. Now the news...

Since this issue has the reprint of Clive Barker's *Yattering and Jack*, plus original artwork from Clive Barker for *Iniquities*, it just makes good sense to begin our journey with one of the newest masters of horror. Clive is gearing up for the next book in the *Arts* trilogy, and his next novel *Imajica* is soon to be released. We have it from a supernatural source that the stage is set for *The Big Apple*, New York. Look forward to dealing with the likes of *Harry D'Amour* once again. Release date is tentative for 1991. Also just when you thought or didn't think, remember to be on the prowl for *Cabal II* and *III*. Hey! has anyone seen hide or hair of the infamous *Shadows of Eden*? I remember hearing about this book over a year ago, still no sign of it from Underwood and Miller. But Clive has just signed a big two movie picture deal with Universal. The titles? One is *The Mummy*. The other is a top secret sci-fi flick. Good stuff Clive!

Tor has published Robert Bloch's *Psycho House*, the third novel of the adventures of Norman Bates. Tor is also publishing *Psycho Paths*, which was originally titled *The Psycho files of Norman Bates*. Bloch is scheduled to appear at World Fantasy Con '90, in Shaumburg, IL Nov 2-4. We had recently visited with Bloch at a book signing, (rather... we had to go pick him up from his home high atop the hills of Los Angeles, California.) He is very interested in our idea for the magazine and has told us that he very much wants to do a story for us in the near future. So we can look forward to that as well.

Mick Garris has just wrapped up directing

Psycho 4 in Florida, release date still pending. He has also developed the series and co-written the pilot for *She Wolf* to air on the USA Network, starring Kate Hodge. You'll remember her from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3-she lived*.

Here is another modern day warrior to the ranks of horror and I know you will agree, Ray Garton. He is enjoying great success in the U.S. and England, and is here once again to thrill us with his most recent effort, *Methods Of Madness*. This book features five new stories by the author. He has sold his novel *Dark Channel*, to Bantam books, and *Ziesing* will be publishing a U.S. hardcover edition of *Live Girls* in October. Look for Ray Garton to appear in our magazine in the future, we know we will.

There are many trecherous perils that lie ahead of us in Shadowlands. Please grab hold of your senses and follow us!

A collection of short stories is being brewed, even as we speak en-titled "Cold Blood". This book will feature stories from Richard Matheson, his son and good buddy R.C. Matheson Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, (which we happen to be looking forward to very much,) and Richard T. Chizmar to do the editing role. The introduction will be done by Douglas Winter, so you can bet this will be one to watch out for.

Dark Harvst is putting out an illustrated hardcover edition of *Shadowfires* by Dean Koontz. This was the last novel written under his pen name Leigh Nichols. We will probably see this one a bit later in the year. Dean has had movie offers on four of his books, *Darkfall*, *Eyes Of Darkness*, *The Face Of Fear* and *Night Chills*, all scheduled for his television show, *The Dean Koontz Theatre*. Dean will be Exec. Producing all four movies, and writing the script for *Darkfall*. Dean Koontz has just signed a major contract with

Putnam and Sons for a four book ten-million dollar deal. Dean has shown interest in our magazine and has agreed to be a part of our brood, and we certainly welcome him with open arms.

Night Visions 8 from Dark Harvest will feature stories by John Farris, Joe R. Lansdale, and England's very own Stephen Gallagher. Robert McCammon will be writing the intro. No word yet as to the illustrator.

Leaving lepidopteri... please don't touch the displays little boy... how cute...

Stephen King has finished the final draft for The Wastelands, the third book in The Dark Tower series. Of course Donald Grant will be publishing this long awaited effort and Ned Demeron is handling the artistic touches for the book. Ned has also done artwork for Black Colossus, Kull, and Into The Sun, for Grant. Misery, the movie should be out soon here in the U.S. and for those of you who have been under a rock, the film will star James Caan as Paul Sheldon, with Kathy Bates as Anne. Directing this masterpiece is Rob Reiner, who also directed Stand By Me.

Thinner is in the works at present time with the screenplay being done by Michael McDowell, so watch out for that. It... the mini for ABC has been pushed back again, and now takes its rightful place next to The Stand, which we've been hearing about for the last five years or so. We hope to see everything come to a head. Basically, start airing these movies. We want action! Lastly, Creepshow 3 has been slated and the shorts will include Dolan's Cadillac, The Rainy Season, Popey, and a new script called Pinfall. The film is still in production at this printing.

New King books to look for are a novella collection called Four Past Mid-night from Viking. King also put the ritz on two more novels, "Needful Things" and "Dolores Claiborne" coming to a book store near you.

Here is a very scary person who is a very close friend of ours, David J. Schow (in this issue!). You can still pick up a copy of the David Schow issue of Weird Tales published earlier this year. His new novel The Shaft, is being published in hardcover by Macdonald in December, concurrent with their release of the paperback The Kill Riff. As for the status of an American publisher picking up The Shaft, hell...who knows? His story Pick Me Up will appear in Psycho Paths. A deal has been confirmed with Dell/Durkin to do the Splatpack audio cassette, which will contain readings of original, brand new short stories read by the Splatpack themselves.

Dan Simmons is wrapping up his new one called "Prayers To Broken Stones" a short story collec-

tion published by the nice folks at Dark Harvest. Beware of this one later this year. He is currently working on the screenplay for Carrion Comfort, (long out of print) and Ed Bryant is helping to chip away at the stone.

The sky above is rearing its black ugly face, and all we can do now is trudge wearily onward. Shadows grow long and thin here in the 'lands, but somehow...some way... la consa mi dereche... we will find our way...

John Skipp and Craig Spector are currently trying to find stories for The Book Of The Dead II, but haven't been able to move an inch since they haven't received anything worth publishing. Their next novel The Bridge, the last in a five book deal with Bantam should be released at the end of this year.

Peter Straub, has an illustrated limited from Grant, Koko and Mrs. God. Also due out soon will be his short story collection entitled "Houses without doors".

Peter Straub will grace the pages of Iniquities second issue with a new original short piece of fiction, so you should be prepared for that.

Cold Shocks, the new anthology (Avon) edited by Tim Sullivan will be released sometime in Spring next year. Contributors include Gary Brandner, Ed Bryant and Graham Masterton.

Due out this fall is one hell of a collection featuring 27 top name writers. The collection is called "Obsessions" and will include a brand new eleven thousand word novella by Dan Simmons entitled "The Counselor".

Last, but certainly not least, is The Shape Under The Sheet. The complete Stephen King Encyclopedia, by Stephen Spignesi. This book will feature everything you ever wanted to know about the master of horror. It will be chalked full of interviews with, R.C. Matheson, Ray Carton, Joe R. Lansdale, and Robert McCammon. The book will be an 8 1/2" by 11" hardcover with about 500 - 600 pages of information. It will probably take you for about \$50.00. For more information call The Overlook Connection, ask for Dave Hinchberger, and tell him you're from the den of Iniquities.

Well friends, it looks like the skies have cleared, the sun is shining, and we see no more monstrosities in sight. Thank you for walking... or running through Shadowlands with us, we count the minutes until we can travel down this road together again in the next issue...

PITT NIGHT at the Lewistone Boneyard

Novella by
David J.
Schow

Illustrations by
Alan M.
Clark





"Pass! Hey!"



Busted. From the moment he'd stepped off the plane, only he hadn't known it.

With automaton familiarity Russell Pitt matched tags for matching luggage and rented a mid-list sedan from Number Two since he enjoyed the illusion of supporting the underdog. He signed into a king-sized single occupancy overlooking the hotel pool. Gold Card. He was comped a newspaper he never got around to opening. Nothing ever happened in Lewistown. Not until he arrived at the cemetery and spotted the yellow cordon tape had he realized something was seriously afoot.

Graveside, he lost his cool. Undercover cops swarmed over him. They nearly had to use cuffs.

Could he just run it down one more time, in case he had forgotten some germane tidbit that might shed light? Police procedure was a little like being mugged and a lot like erosion. As if police could solve this mess; as if you could hire C. Auguste Dupin for thirty large a year.

His full name was Russell Leaver Pitt. They already had that typed. Then whited out, then spelled correctly. He had been named for his paternal grandfather, Leaver Millard Mortimer Pitt, a name that reminded him of the glottal gibberish hollered by footballers before they said *hike*.

"Okay. Okay. I live in Westwood. That's in Los Angeles, near UCLA. They used to call it Waspswood; they...never mind."

His breast pocket wallet was open on the desk, gutted, credit cards scattered like spilled organs.

"I make this trip once a year. Same time every year. The date of my father's death. He was the last one to. Pass on."

Russell was one of those people who had a lot of trouble using the words *love* and *dead*. He sipped from a styro cup of brackish cooler water while the

detective taking notes chain-smoked and never blinked once. No human camaraderie there. Russell saw his own teeth marks on the cup. He hadn't done anything wrong. But everybody who did this dance was innocent, right?

Tough it out.

"My father's death was the only one I gave a damn about, you see." A lie. It was easy to hide important details from this creature with the shield. No polygraph alarms kicked on. Russell relaxed a notch.

"And my father was the last one. The last one to go, I mean. Except for me, so I guess I'm actually the last one. The last of the Pitts."

The thing with the cigarette snorted; asked about wife, kids, pets, houseplants.

"I've been married twice. No kids. Neither of them — my ex-wives — wanted to keep my name. One is remarried."

The other one, Maggie, had showed up via mailbox two days ago. She'd learned how to use a word processor and hadn't bothered to separate pages for him. Emotions in dot matrix. She'd been wrong, she admitted, in saying that she never wanted to lose touch with him no matter what their feelings were. As soon as she linked up with her newest soul mate that little commitment had breezed. She needed life-space, she'd said. That was the sort of thing people who have lived in Westwood Village said. They grazed, they cocooned, they firmed their abs, they listened to Grammy-winning tunes and watched Woody Allen movies, they pretended to enjoy dull sex. Maggie was long gone, but still needed to yank his chain from a safe distance. Hail, hail, the USPO.

Time to skip town. Time to seek respite in a change of scene.

"Usually I make the trip on June third. I'm early this time. First time." He'd already said that once. June was the month traditionalists got married. Divorces months were still optional.

Elise had been a May, Maggie a December.

"It's a tradition. Sort of."

That one would have sounded lame had it not been so true. When you're the only family you have, you must invent your own traditions or do without. His mother's side of the brood had determined this. Genes said frog and synapses jumped. As traditions went, this one was fairly morbid. His half-sister would have called it perverse; his grandmother, quaint. But if relatives had been available, there would have been no need to fabricate the tradition in the first place.

"I come and I put flowers on all the graves. They're all buried together. Family plot. Except this year I'm a couple of days early and all the graves are empty."

The chain-smoking detective snorted like a bloodhound on a hit of cayenne. This guy's story kept

mutating. This guy was from Los fucking Angeles. Too-long workdays always started like this.

At least dead people didn't have to eat bullshit by the spoonful.



"Yeah, you! Peasi!"



Russ debarks. En route to the rental counters he watches outbound fliers suffer security. He has already been processed. Now he is invisible.

By rote, he stacks 'em up and knocks 'em down. Car, hotel, room service. Good tipping renders one less invisible. He hates being called *sir* or *Mister Pitt*.

Valley View Memorial Park reeks of mown lawn in need of more irrigation. Too countrified for his nose. He could smell his way to the family plot if he was blind.

Mondo bucks have gone to secure the "right" suburb in this here Necropolis. His sister Darianne has a better view post mortem than she'd ever enjoyed while breathing.

It is like a circle for psychomancy, a Druid ring of granite and marble markers. The eldest stone is for Ross Wright Christian Loret, great maternal grandfather. At the hub of the circle is Mister Mort.

Mister Mort reaches skyward to snatch chunks of heaven. The beatific expression chiseled onto his face suggests he can see something we can't; something wonderful. Lunch, perhaps. He is quite androgynous. Mix Mort, perhaps. He is the only tenant not dead, because the igneous rock from which he is carved has never lived.

Mister Mort is enrobed and sandaled, very Biblical. From the foot of his pedestal to the end of his upstretched fingertip is about fifteen feet. The ceiling in Darianne's studio apartment had been touchable from the floor. On Mister Mort's imposing plinth is engraved the family name in letters eighteen inches high.

PITT. Very big deal.

A nameshown no mercy by any gradeschooler. It rhymes with too many facile cuss-words and suggests too many bodily functions. Russ has suffered for his name. In the Westwood phone book he once found a listing for a family actually named Sauerbutt. Now that would be a genuine nightmare.

Russ wonders if having a weird name was one of the last things on Darianne's mind when she died. She had spent her final month in an ICU, withering like a carnation out of water on a hot day and never savoring full consciousness. Killed by her own blood. Her brain stopped working and Darianne went to meet Mister Mort.

Russ has developed the affectation of talking to the statue, since he has heard that talking to *yourself* is a sign that you are crazy. The name Mister Mort is his invention. There is no one around to contest this. Russ shuts the iron gate to the footpath and strolls among dead strangers. He sees Mister Mort gradually poke over the hummock to greet him. He always sees the upstretched fingertip first. Every time.

"Allo, Monsieur Mort," Russ says to himself in a feathery French accent.

A manicured trail engirds the circle of grave markers like the outer edge of a wagon wheel. One can mosey around the circle and browse the Pitt family timeline of Beloved Mothers and Loving Fathers and Julia Bernford Pitt, who at six months had suffocated on her own malfunctioning infant pipework, and whose plot marker is engraved with a lamb, a fashion popular through the Roaring Twenties.

Here is Darianne, of course, and Ricky. His half-sister Simone. And Mom and Dad and Grandpa, alias Leaver Millard Mortimer Pitt. It occurs to Russ that he has named Mister Mort for his grandfather, unconsciously.

He is passing down a name after all.

That one is still a big enough deal to guilt Russ out whenever he is two drinks past his ceiling and sleeping solo. No kids. The Pitt line ceases when Russ ceases. Mom had dutifully doled forth a lot of well-meaning grief on this topic. Some people, thinks Russ, progress solely in terms of animal bottom lines. If you have graduated, are not imprisoned or terminally ill and are married, then reproduction was the only party topic left for those Christmas and birthday phone calls. Mother's Day. Father's Day. Thanksgiving. Enough federally-sanctioned caesuras in the work calendar to make Russ second-guess his own life until it hitched and broke.

Mom and Dad are interred side-by-side. If Russ faces the graves, looking more or less dead into Mister Mort's groin, Dad is on the right. Dad was a southpaw. His favored hand is not the one nearest the resting place of his only wife. Russ wonders if such oversights perturb the departed.

Mom to the left. Then Dad. Celeste Christine and Harvey Millard Pitt. Stroke and a car crash. The tombstones return Russ's gaze and nag. *Why didn't you ever make us grandparents?*

Because dogs can mate, Russ thinks, too defensively. Spawning takes no talent. Stupid people do it accidentally. Building, incorporating, investing, *thinking* your way into a name for yourself, this is an itinerary that can still speed Russ's pulse. Rising to the top of your chosen field. Doing well enough to afford such lavish burial real estate.

Dad had set up that last one, before dying himself.

Russ plans to be cremated and scattered. Back to the elements. That way, you never have to worry about being dug up.

Now he can see the plots. A ring of holes, empty graves all. Adrenalin floods. Coffin-sized automatons in the coil, their dirt floors exposed to sunlight. A barrier of bright yellow tape that repeats DO NOT CROSS over and over. Russ crosses, gape-mouthed, trying to ask the first question, puzzling whom to ask.

Pass. From the grove.

Russ turns. An incredibly filthy derelict is summoning him from behind the forked bole of a gigantic cottonwood tree. Grinning.

This is too bloody much. Not what Russ needs in his life. He screams epithets at the bum.

The cops taking out the gravesite swoop. By the time Russ can produce any meaningful ID his day had turned to garbage.

What bum, the cops ask. We didn't see any bum. Just you.

Russ has never experienced a bona fide hallucination. This possibility scares him.

At the station the police say they will need to detain him until they can think up different questions. There is no local precedent for this degree of desecration. No investigative method that will hint at the location of the bodies.

Graveyards always appear deceptively safe in daylight.



Russell was thankful to wait in the holding tank. Not a cell, nor as creepy as an interrogation cubicle with ashtrays and a one-way mirror. The old Russell would have craved a cigarette about now; at least Maggie had helped him that far.

From the tank he could see activity in the corridor. Two pay phones were mounted on the cinder block wall above his bench. Steel doors and a hand-through window like the ones used by drive-up tellers. He'd signed a form that noted he was self-employed. Right now, machines were busy stalking and verifying everything he had ever done.

He carried no pocket change and had no family to phone. There was no one he genuinely wished to advise of his predicament.

Ten more minutes and they'd cut him loose and he'd be out of this mess. A quarter hour clocked off and he told himself again: *Ten more minutes.*

Russell's company was called Aloft Limited. As in holding things aloft, that is, suspended. Hanging. Russell Pitt was a coat hanger baron. Aloft manufactured wire ones, chrome ones, unthievable plastic ones for hotels. Fancy wooden ones that matched the grooming racks sold by *Playboy*. Millions of hangers for America's garment needs. People required hangers for everything. To unlock their cars. To wire that stubborn trunk lid shut. To abort unwanted progeny, if the government got any more medieval.

Aloft had successfully branched into mannequins, which were really *extremely elaborate* coat-hangers. Aloft had innovated nipples and pubic mounds for their surrogate women, pees and crotch lumps for the males.

The destruction of defective mannequins had provided the entertainment at one company party. Russell had presided. Layered craniums got gleefully pulverized with baseball bats; it was a lot like a seal hunt with no blood. The employees had laughed rather too stridently amid all this drinking and bashing. Russell had been *pretty sure* they weren't clobbering the Boss by proxy.

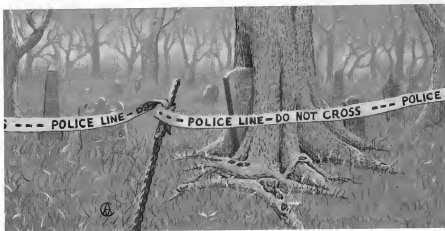
When Russell took his own turn at bat, he had thought of his elder half-sister, Simone. Simone had been ash-blond. The mannequin had been bald because wig cost money. Nevertheless, the substitution had come easily in his mind's eye. KABOOM. Simone's stand in head exploded into colored dust *real* good.

Some grudges outlast those who foment them.

Simone had swung in on a vine from Mom's side of the family at age thirteen, to promptly drive Russell as berserk as any teenager can any pre-teen. Their first squabble had come over bedroom assignments — who got one to themselves, and who had to share. Young Russell was billeted with younger brother Ricky. It had been his first taste of sexism.

On the day Russell knew Simone's casket was being lowered into the humid embrace of Valley View's turf, he had thought to himself: *Here's a room all to yourself, Simone. Like the fit? Snug but accommodating? Enjoy.*

Simone had waved bye-bye to the world of mortals from the shooting end of a hypodermic needle.



"Pitts? Or Pitts?"

Russell snapped to, imagining he had just heard another *passt*. A cop was casing him through scratchy plexiglas. Bail had been duly posted.

By who? Nobody knew he was in Lewistone today. He'd escaped Lewistone long ago to make good in the real world. Success via coat hanger. Lewistone was fly-over country.

Bail was bail. The cop guessed some relative, not knowing how absurd this assumption was.

Russell saw his benefactor through the booking desk mirror as he was issued a sealed plastic bag containing his personal property. It was the derelict from the cemetery, the one who had entreated him from behind the trees. The hallucination. He was seedy and threadbare and filthy. He did not smell like an illusion.

His eyes were the technical blue of clean cocktail ice, and gave him away.

It was Grandpa. He still had gravedirt on him.



"Gawdamn. Haven't had me a cup of coffee this good in, what is it? Seventeen years."

It had been that long since Grandpa had presumably gone to meet a maker who wouldn't toss him back into the world like a runt trout.

"You are *not* my grandfather. You cannot be my grandfather. I will not *allow* you to be my grand-

father."

"Ain't up to you, kiddo."

Grandpa had always called him kiddo.

The man sitting across from Russell harrumphed. Mold sifted from his dry nostrils. Russell watched it swirl in contrails in the coffee. The old man did not seem to mind it. He signalled for another refill and paid close attention to the waitress' legs.

"Leaver Millard Mortimer Pitt." The old man was jaunty and enjoying the hell out of this. "Born at home in Bourbon County, Kentucky, town by the name of Anniford, twenty-ninth of April, eighteen and eighty-seven. My Daddy read me about Jack the Ripper when I was three. I was born a Pittenhaus but the family was Danish. Daddy changed the name when he and Mom and my older brother Francis emigrated. Mom always called Daddy 'Da.' His full name was Frits Whelan Carlsen Pittenhaus and he built outrigger vessels. You saw him a grand total of once, when you were a sprout, and you didn't say anything momentous, but you did throw up on him on account of you ate some stale fish."

This was just too quaint. With too many mysterious ingredients.

"You generally saw more of your momma's father.

Grandpa Rosa."

"You looked all this up," Russell interposed. "Or invented it. I don't -"

"Hold on." The old man's hand was up. "Damn, but it's *fine* to see what you've grown into. I don't expect you to believe a word of this hooey, Russell. Not yet, nohow. You still take after your momma the skeptic. But there ain't no rush. You're just going to sit and chatter awhile with some old coot nutty enough to sling your ass clear of the pokey, because your tailor says you have manners. And I'm gonna drink me about

a gallon of this coffee. Thank the saints coffee is still a constant, what with the way everything else in the world flips channels every five seconds. You sit and pay attention. And I'll do the convincing. Deal?"

Russell scanned the restaurant. No candid video. No solace. He shrugged. Never did he speak to street grubs or panhandlers; rigidly he kept eyes front and veered from their open palms and slurred pitches. If you engaged them on any level, even by acknowledging their mere presence, you were courting trouble. This was a lifetime of bum karma catching up with him.

"By damn."

Was this to recapture his attention?

"Sorry. S'just I'm having a helluva spell not crushing you to death with a hug, son. Grandson. Jesus H."

That touched Russell. A bit.

He yawned and waved a hand. Get on with it and maybe I'll catch some sleep today, he thought. I'll tune you out and think my way clear over a hot cuppa. The real Grandpa would have just shucked the sleepy ass from a nap of nearly two decades. Rip Van Pitt. Prattle away.

"Now, the way I see it, you're toting around a world of hurt on account of there was just too goddamn much tragedy pent up in our family. Whole clan dropping like skeeters left and right; a clean house in a decade and change, and only you left. My gosh, the weight of that. You never was much a-one for family rituals — Exmas get-togethers and all that."

Grandpa had always referred to Christmas as Exmas. He had one of those senses of humor that said, by god, if it was funny in 1938, it's funny now god-dammit.

"So let me ask you: Why do you make this dogged trip every year, on the day your Daddy died?" Impatient, he overrode Russell's response with a hand wave identical to the one Russell had just used. "I'll tell ya: It was because you forevermore had to do things your own way, you prideful son of a gun. Ain't traditions you was contrary to. It was tired, hackneyed, clichéd traditions clenched your butt. You never had to howl to the moon that you loved your Daddy. You proved it by making that trip, faithfully, year-in, year-out, regular as a postman. A pragmatist like you. Now that's gotta be love."

Not necessarily, Russell thought. Try guilt.

"Now, I loved your Daddy too. Still do. And I never got to say all the neat stuff I'd planned to say to him, either. All that parental bushwa you store in the attic of your head, for later. Tell you one thing, though — neither him nor me liked that Maggie very much."

"Hang on." Russell felt air hitting the dirty laundry of his life, trying to ventilate it. "My father loved her. He understood about the divorce."

"Bull balls. He was polite to her. He was

relieved when you two split up because she would have nailed you to a headshrinker's sofa to the tune of thirteen big ones a year. I was relieved, too."

Russell's grandfather had died three years prior to his first marriage, to Elise.

"I know what you're thinking." The old man wagged a finger. There was grave dirt embedded beneath the nail. "I chessed that out with your Daddy the way I'm talking to you, right now."

Russell let his cup down gently. Coffee sloshed like sulfuric acid in his stomach.

"Okay — you *did* see all them holes, am I right?"

"I saw them." Russell fizzled.

"Well. There ya go, then."

Grandpa — if Grandpa this was — signalled for another refill. Could caffeine keep the dead up all night, fidgeting?

Something smacked the coffee shop window right next to their booth. Russell flinched, then saw flecks of scorched flesh sticking to the thick glass.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," he said.

"Nahh. You flatter him. It's just your Daddy."



Russ pounds his way through Aloft's quarterly tax estimate and an ugly migraine. His assistant Debra glides in ashen-faced, without knocking, to inform him that his father has just been pronounced DOA following a vehicular collision two thousand miles to the east.

She does not tell him over the intercom. Nice of her. He puts his papers down after neatening the stack, and tells her to please shut the door.

Alone, he sits in his office thinking, *well, that's it, the last of them.*

There are no family photos or memorabilia decorating his wall space. There are certificates of achievement. A couple of civic commendations and a plaque from the C of C. An overlit 8x10 of Russ shaking hands with the mayor. A color shot of Russ posed next to his factory gate for a Leisure Section article entitled "His Hang-Ups are Our Hang-Ups." A blank patch where there used to be a framed photo of him and Maggie having dinner at Chasen's. But no family. None built by him, nor foisted upon him. No dynasty.

The day his marriage to Maggie had been declared null and void, he'd stowed that last shot. It is as if Maggie has died for awhile, but she doesn't do him

Schow

the courtesy. After a period just long enough to calm his pain and paranoia, she will burgle her way back into his life with her annoying and judgmental letters...

When Russ checks the clock again it has gone dark outside. Debra loiters. In case he needs coffee. Or something. His father has died today.

It occurs to Russ that he possesses no photographs of himself and his father together in the same shot. None. Not since he was twelve.

Leaver Wright Millard Pitt had departed this world at the wheel of a Lincoln Towne Car after catapulting through an inadequate guardrail and a Rosenman Dairies tanker. The truck driver had spotted gushing gas and hauled ass for seven steps before concussion lifted him off his feet and knocked out his front tooth on the pavement. Raw milk had rained over the offramp, eputtering the flames.

Russell remembered the stupid canned music at the funeral service.

Once Dad had taken up residence at Mister Mort's sandaled feet, Valley View's fertilization was complete in terms of Pitts but for Russell's vacant berth. One year following Dad's interment, Russell had decided to repeat the eastward trip. Habit stuck.

Grandpa had died of old age, his only crime decrepitude. The seedy, grime-etched ragbag seated across from Russell in the deuce booth could charitably be described as decrepit.

Russell's father, however, had fried like a pork chop in napalm. The mortician had bypassed any attempt to gussy him up in favor of the sealed box plan — no fuss, no muss, no blood on the chapel carpeting.

Char and biologic goo ebbed slowly down the window.

"Prob'ly thirsty. He burned, you know."

"That was *not* my father," Russell envisioned a zombieified corpse lurching into the nearest 7-11 for a Big Gulp. "That was —"

"Some kinda sick joke, yep, I figured you'd say that, you being so *rational* and all. Heh." The old man's chuckle kick-started a raspy cough. The cough stuck, midway out. He sneezed and raised a cloud of dust.

"Gesundheit."

A moth zipped from between his lips and headed for the ceiling. A fine film of charnel soot now layered the table between them. The waitress — the one with the good calves — hurried over to ask if he needed a glass of water.

"More coffee, darlin'," he smiled. His teeth were the color of good tobacco.

Russell's eyes kept traveling back to the black-red paste congealing on the window. It had stopped moving and started drying. God, he thought. No way

Pitt Night

that's part of my dad.

"Yep. That's him awright," asserted the Grandpa imposter. "When he was a scamp he was always leaving his crap *everywhere*."

A whumping migraine had needle-pointed Russell's brow to his sinuses. "Old man ... I have to get out of here. Leave. You are a grade-A, vitamin-fortified fruitcake. With big chunky nuts."

The old man nodded big, smiled bigger.

"I have to find out what the hell happened to my family. Their bodies."

"Sure. I *know* that. Cynic." He slurped his coffee. Added more sugar.

Decorum insisted Russell say more in taking leave of this stranger who had at least the kindness to front bail money. But in the end, his hands did a useless, air-grabbing dance and he bolted, lending the emear of gore on the window a final doubtful look as he passed outside.

"Shoot," said the old man to his coffee cup. A baby beetle crawled out of his left ear, fell, and missed the cup. "You shoulda showed up on time, youngster, you wanted everything to be so damned normal and boring. We'd'a stayed in the holes if we'd known you'd be so damned upset."



Russell was jogging by the time he regained Valley View. His shirt had ripped out of tuck; its tail flapped and sweat moons darkened the pits. He'd forgotten his jacket back at the booth. Fortunately he still affected a hip-pocket wallet even though its bulge tended to spoil the line of his better trousers.

The shirt he could trash. He had five hundred shirts, all of them on Aloft Limited hangers, none worn more than the mandatory thirty dry-cleanings. When you manufacture coat hangers it's easy to get the best shirts for free.

A funeral was in progress. Russell saw a parked row of limos and sedans bumper-to-bumper against one side of the path in a long snaky train. He turned heads when he clambered through the iron gate. No one here knew him.

Some bum, they'd think. A derelict sniffing for a secluded cubby in which to snore off his stereo.

To be dead was to be past tense. Old news. Forgotten and unknown. A relief, given the right circumstances.

He ducked into the grouping of cottonwood

trees and found a wrought iron bench picked out in spatters of bird guano. He sat and evened his breathing until he was calmer. Just over the rise, he knew, Mister Mort stood steadfast sentry duty, unaware that his flock had given him the elip.

He felt the sting of the ire and contempt fired at him by the anonymous mourners - mild revulsion, cheap pity, glaring anger. Where was his respect for the dead?

Russell heard muffled laughter. The dead were ridiculing him. Snickering not behind his back, but below his shoes.

Then Russell Pitt saw a singular thing.

Ten yards from where he sat, the grate securing the entry to a modest crypt squeaked open. The granite lintel was graven with the name TROWBRIDGE. A middle-aged man in a black three-piece winnowed past the stuck gate. Leaving, not entering. This was no mirage or resurrected cadaver, but a normal-looking human - as normal as a yip-yup dressed in a \$150 bargain suit could look. Russell watched, himself unobserved. The man brushed tomb dust from his jacket, eyes darting around. Then he sidled uphill to blend with the troupe of mourners. It was like watching a kid sneak into the movies.

"Still spying on me, Russ? Catch an eyeful?"

It was Simone, his elder half-sister. She had no trouble swinging back the metal door to the TROWBRIDGE crypt. The laughter had been hers, and she smiled poisonously at him as she buttoned up the heirloom gown in which she'd been buried the year after Grandpa died.

The first woman's breasts, live ones, Russ can remember seeing as a kid are Simone's.

She is spinning "Blue Angel" on a portable phonograph. You have to stack nickels on the tone arm to keep it from skipping. She is dancing before the vanity mirror in her bedroom. She is also feeling herself up in a very odd way, and Russ concludes that Simone is making herself, well, kinda *hot* and *bothered*.

She is thirteen, Russ is ten.

She sort of hoists one bare breast in her hand, then lets it drop back into shape. She glides the palms of her hands over her nipples until they stand out. Russ wonders what they feel like.

Simone finally catches him peeking through the keyhole and whales the spit out of him.

About six months later she lets Russ feel her tits. He calls them *tite* now. A trade-off; come you feel mine-I'll feel yours skulduggery after bedtime. She touches him *there* and he gets an instant hard-on. Four seconds later, he ejaculates and it startles him. She teases him about it for a week or so, then forgets.

Nearly thirty-one years later he will still feel that pang of shame and confusion.

Simone is what was once called precocious.

She spends her high school career getting impregnated by a rogue's gallery of deadbeats and losers with good cars. Her real mother, Aunt Jae, dies. Of a broken heart, claims Russ' mom, who tries an inappropriate level of understanding to deal with Simone. Dad turns to etone in the face of this womanly problem child. It is a mess that only gets more randic. Simone's blazing youth is responsible for the near-traumatization of Russ' younger sister, Darianne, who as a long-term result is sheltered and protected to the point of near suffocation.

Simone is sixteen, Russ has just turned thirteen.

Simone sneaks into his room, drops her robe and tries to get something going. Russ makes her *leave* ... more out of fear than anything.

And he can still hear her laughter in his head, ridicule aimed right at his sexuality.

Like the scorn from the funeral attendees.

From that moment they are polarized. No petty insult or mean trick is beneath opportunistic use by one against the other, the enemy.

When Simone finally rides a speedball too hard and catches a slight case of death, Russ pointedly does not attend the services in Lewistown.

Only six people do. None of whom have ever slept with Simone. Or loved her, truly.

There was no mistaking Simone. The gown would have done it even had Russell not recognized the simmering blue gaze and aggressive folded-arm stance that had always been her battle trademarks.

The gown had belonged to Grandpa's late wife. Someone was supposed to have gotten married in it, but things had not worked out.

"So I suppose you just sat there, buffing your woody and moaning, just now." She nailed him, steely-eyed, one hand stroking the rusted bar work of the TROWBRIDGE tomb. "Good old Russ. The king of second-hand gratification."

He was dying to hit something Simone seemed like a bulls-eye, begging for it.

"So what? You crawl out of your hole and somebody crawls into your hole, right?"

She indicated the funeral service in progress on top of the hill. "It's just some aunt getting planted. That dude had nothing better to do." She laughed. Russ knew the laugh well. "I can turn men on even after I'm as dead as your dick."

"Why the hell couldn't you just stay in your box?" The afternoon was effervescent with sexual puns.



"Had to come, baby. Had to have that friction, that heat again. Sooo delicious. It's been way too long and I needed a fill-up. Top my tank. You care to make a contribution, little brother?"

She lifted her gown to expose her naked groin to him. Tangled in her pubic hair were rose petals, brittle and long-crushed.

A new perversion: Necrophilia where the corpse helped you get off.

Simone's body was the same rib-strut thin, knobknosed, ninety-pound fever dream to which the dope had scarified her years back. Her nipples were gray. On her thighs Russell could see the glint of epillage from her most recent lover, the guy in the bargain suit.

He imagined being inside her. No, he imagined *that guy* fucking her. Feeling nonmuscular squirmings in there. A decade and a half of rotten meat and parasites.

His scrotum contracted, flinching defensively.

"Come on, Russ. Chow down. Sloppy seconds. What's the matter - aren't I *man* enough for you?"

"Fuck you, Simone. Slither back into the mulch where you belong." He had risen and was closer now, stalking her, knuckles bloodlessly tight, hands snapping shut to close her mouth, to break her face, to smash her jackstraw skeleton, to vent all the times he'd never fought back, all the times he'd spared her and tried to hurt her verbally. Because Simone had always been *enough trouble already*. Because Russell had always been *so fair*.

Wasn't that nice. Look where it got you.

"Fuck you, Simone." This time he said it with feeling.

"Yeah, fuck me *hard*, you dickless wonder. Eunuch. Bat boy. I'll have to teach you *how* to fuck me, fuck me until I can't -"

"Shut up!"

He patted her once, a single hammer-blow into that maw of derision. Simone's face caved in like papier mache and clouded the foyer of the crypt with thick, floating dust the tint of cosmetic powder. She crumpled and imploded; the gown pooled. Russell remembered bashing the mannequin. This had been easier. Killing something that isn't dead. Exorcism by collision.

His throat pulsed. He had been yelling, loudly, things he could not recall. Tears streaked his cheeks. They cut through the dust that had been Simone a moment before.

He inhaled her and gagged, turning from the tomb and covering his mouth and nose. His handkerchief was still in his left-hand back pocket.

Calm. Calm. He mopped his face and raked back his hair. Exhaled her. Back at the crypt lay an empty, worm-eaten gown.

He exhaled her.

After all these years, at last, Simone was gone

for good.



"I thought I told you *never* to strike your sister, Russell Leaver Pitt."

He only got his full legal name when major poop was alarm-piping toward him. He hadn't even finished dabbing Simone off his brow.

"Mom...?" It was necessary that he say it. He was so drained of surprise, so void of shock, that speech was needed to benchmark in his stunned brain the impossible return of his mother.

"I don't care if you didn't love her. Or if you don't think she was *really* your sister..."

Obviously there was going to be a severe problem with tense if dead people insisted on doing encores. "...a gentleman *never* strikes a lady. I suppose you hit Darianne, when my back was turned?"

Mom was playing a tape from 1965, back when he had first said:

"Mom, I hate her guts, okay? I've *always* hated her guts. She's not my sister, she's not my blood, and she certainly ain't no lady, and I'm surprised at you. I'd never lay a finger on Darianne, you *know* that."

"Don't say *ain't*. It's ugly. Ugly as the thoughts of boys when they get in a certain mood. You know what I mean."

Mom's speech was hideously slurred. Russell recalled how the stroke had fuzzed her voice. Her funeral corsage hung, long dead. She had insisted on being buried in her wedding gown, a morose touch Dad had never challenged. Perhaps she'd gotten the idea from Simone, and that was why she was defending her now. The gown was - had been - white. Now every detail of the elaborate brocade and lace was highlighted in grave dirt.

"Don't you *dare* stand there silent when you've got something to get off your chest, Russell Leaver Pitt."

It wasn't his chest. It was his back, and Mom was on it again. He had never wanted to do the nasty with Simone. Never, in his heart. What he had wanted was to punch her lights out, just once. And Simone had accommodatingly risen from her grave to goad him into that one-time-only roundhouse - a liberating blow some thirty years in the making.

A cleansing blow.

And now here came Mom, urging him to speak

his mind, to say whatever had been left unsaid. Back for him, one final time, her complexion blanched by the Reaper and her voice lumbered by the attack that had claimed her. But her eyes, my god, Russell thought, her eyes. All coffee and chocolate brown, eyes that accused him lightly yet loved him deeply, eyes that considered him now, and waited for him the way they always had.

"Mother. Mom..."

Once he permitted the portals to open, the words rushed forth easily.

"...you never mentioned anything to me about love. We never got around to talking about the one thing that's more important than grades, or jobs, or social status or making money. I did all that. And when I had the things I wanted—the possessions, the position, the bonded-and-certified future—I'd been through two marriages and I don't think I've truly loved anyone yet. I sort of have an idea of what it's supposed to feel like, and I can go through the motions, but I always know I'm just performing the way other people expect me to. My marriages were social contracts. Mergers. Co-op collaborations. My spouse was a perk, an arm dolly for public functions. The only thing we ever worried about during either divorce was who got which car; who kept the house and who vacated. You never met Maggie, but you knew Elise."

"You two were so young." She spoke softly, almost subaurally. No one but Russell could hear her, and his mind filled in gaps and made it *her* voice, the voice she'd had when vibrantly alive, the voice she'd used as a mother saying the things mothers are supposed to say to their sons.

"Not young in age. Young to the world. You needed each other so you could both learn what not to do. So that when you moved on, you would both know how to properly treat the next person to whom you would come close in life."

Mom had treated Elise with polite but distanced tolerance, as though she alone knew when Elise's train would be leaving. Russell had trapezed into marriage *sans* net, to learn from scratch since he carried no baggage of motherly advice. He hated to admit it, but Elise had brought him out of himself, opened him up to feelings and experiences that, as a result, had left him much more civil and charming by the time Maggie chanced along. This chrysalis, unfortunately, had not been shed in time to do Elise any worldly good. She had a working knowledge of all Russell's internal mechanisms, even the defensive and painful ones...and she would never trust any change in his character.

"You didn't mean that about boys being ugly, did you? You didn't think that of me."

Celeste Christine Pitt had not been a perfect storybook mommy, okay. Who ever was, in the real world?

"Russell, I need to tell you something now that I never would, before. When your father and I were married, that last year of the War, I was totally emitten. You could call me a starstruck girl. It's impossible now to convey what VE Day was like. But the first night I slept with your father was the finest night I had ever spent with a man. The finest. Because until him, men had never taken the time to pleasure me. Men lived up to their worst caricatures, and only *took*, and jumped away clean before eunup. They didn't etay the night, you see."

This was scandalous. His own mother was admitting she'd slept around prior to getting hitched. It was eminently probable, yet wholly ungraspable for Russell—like trying to visualize your own parents clawing and heaving and going oh god oh god and making you.

"He and I signed up for the duration. When our Julia died, he and I both died, just a little." She paused to cast a respectful eye toward the Pitt graves. "But we had you, and Ricky and the girls, even though Simone was forever a hellion. That was my sister Jae's way of doing things, you see. Just ehove kids into the world to paddle or drown. Sometimes I thought Simone was my punishment for some wrong I'd done your Aunt Jae when we were children. But you listen: As bad as you got, as wrong as you did sometimes, there was never a second I didn't love you heart and soul. Death doesn't have the power to take away the fact that you're my baby. Death can't overshadow the fact that I lie with your father still, every night here in Lewistown. We lay down together, then we signed up."

"What about you and Dad?" Perversely, Russell found he wanted to hear a lot more.

She smiled at some private thing; something she'd keep, for now. "I wanted to feel, all the time, like I felt when your father and I made love. And you know what? I think that we started with pure lust for each other, and love came later. We'd left it an open door, you see, and it walked right into our lives to sustain us when our family began to die piecemeal. It helps us even now. What do you think brought you all this distance, back to a town you hate, after all these years, with no kin and nothing to visit but graves?"

Where Simone had brought Russell an insane strength, a fury to charge his metabolism and muscles, he now felt an emptiness, a profound weakening, as though a pipette had been jammed into his spine to siphon off his bone marrow.

Mom drew closer, drifting, a shade. It was an obvious effort for her to move. More fallout from her stroke. The sounds from beneath the bridal gown suggested the awful grinding of dry joints and the splitting of withered flesh. Russell ignored them. He had to.

"I love you so much." Mom embraced him gently, a ghost making tentative physical contact.

He touched but dared not hold her. He forced his arms to hang about her, laying no weight or pressure. Superficially, it resembled a hug.

"See?" she said. "You don't want me to crumble away, fragile old fossil that I am. You care, too, tough guy. And I think you'll meet someone who will appreciate what you have."

True to form, she paused a beat before delivering her zinger: "And then maybe I'll get to be a Grandma."

"Motheerrrr..."

She laughed then, and it was the way she used to laugh all the time, over unwrapped birthday gifts or after patching sibling spats. Her laugh could give you the strength to go on.

"Mom, I -"

She shushed him. "I need you to do something for me. I need you to turn around, and not look at me, and keep your eyes on that stone for a few moments while I leave. No goodbyes at this late date."

He tried to add things then, extend this visitation. Win another sixty seconds. She was too smart for him.

"Forget all that. This is what is important: Hear me when I say you're still my son, and I still love you, and nothing changes that. Ever. Now take your love and make something of it. Promise me."

"I love you, Mom. I'll try. I promise." As he spoke he felt a loosening in his chest. Another burden lifting, even as her touch abandoned his arm and he did as he was told, reading the TROWBRIDGE stone to himself, over and over.

Funny thing, him standing there all by himself saying *I love you* repeatedly until it became *I will love. I will try*.

By then Russell Pitt's mother had disappeared. Wind stirred dead leaves.



He had to lock down a breather minute. The iron bench offered rest and concealment and he turned back to it.

It was occupied, and the guy sitting there scooted over to cut space for Russell as he neared. The stranger moved in an awkward, uncoordinated way, a puppet with etrings the wrong length.

Russell immediately found himself back in urban fortress mode: *Terrific; now I have to listen to*

this jerk drone on about his birth defects and why he's here and all that rot...

"I never forgot what you told me once about people," the man said.

Russell froze before he rounded the bench. He had one hand on it. He clamped his eyes shut, then covered them with his other hand.

This was not Ricky. It could not be Ricky, sitting on the bench and waiting for him, just as it could not have been Simone or Mom or Grandpa or the black-broiled, oozing thing that would be his father after the fatal freeway wreck, the seventh anniversary of which had just come and gone.

"Man, I can still hear your voice; that tone." He scared up a fair mimic of Mister R. Pitt, bossman of Aloft Limited, waxing lectionary, speechmaking, an address for success. "Know what I wish, Ricky?" you said. "I wish people died when you were done with 'em." And I asked you what that meant and you told me you weren't sure but it sounded right."

"Messy. Is what I said." He still wasn't looking.

Ricky and Russell had attended Mom's funeral together. And Ricky would be moving crookedly because of his legs...

"If people die when you're done with them, then you never have to worry about explaining yourself. You don't have to watch your friends age. Or your enemies prosper. Or lovers fall in love with someone who's not you. You don't have to watch your ex-girlfriend amble into a restaurant on the arm of a great-looking guy while you're sitting there, eating alone. And I guess you would no longer have to put up with your mom's nagging about grandkids. Am I warm?"

Very funny, Russell thought. Ricky was still a smart ass.

Family cliché had it that Russell was the brainy one, the introvert, the schemer, while Ricky had been the track star, the suntanner, the popular one. You saw Ricky on every spa billboard in L.A.

Ricky had gone parasailing on his twenty-fifth birthday, he and his cronies toasting his survival of a quarter century with beer steins of Piper-Heidsieck. When Ricky was aloft the boat pilot accidentally rammed a buoy. Ricky's chute folded up while the pilot freaked, flipped the boat, and lived. Ricky had paid out too much line and flown too high. Striking the water from his altitude was like hitting plywood. Both his legs were smashed. Then he drowned.

"You didn't do so bad with Mom. You've changed, bro."

"Only within the last twelve hours or so."

"Come on, Russ-man. Say hi. I look okay. Still handsome. Nothing like Dad. Poor sumbitch."

"How come all those goddamn cops that nailed me this morning haven't seen any of you, if you all just brushed off grave dirt and went strolling?"

"Gimme a break, big guy. We didn't drop by for the badge dudes. We came back for *vous*. You came to see us every year so I guess it's time for us to return the social favor. You'll notice it's just us — no great aunts, or, like, ancient ancestors. Just us."

Russell stared at his own hands, picturing Ricky as he had been eleven years removed. Robust, alert and ready to party. With his voice right there, it was simple to form the picture.

"Just us?"

"Get with the program, ace. You know: Immediate family. Back to ole Grandpa, our big moby patriarch." Ricky had never been jounced on Great Grandpa Frita's kneebone. "Sorta like a group-rate funeral in reverse, huh? Totally weird."

On the crest of the hill the nameless flock of black euntes was still congregated, enduring eulogies. From here Russell could not discern the guy who had been Simone's living dead quickie. He could hear the clockwork of the casket rack lowering its burden into the soil.

None of *his* family had stayed beneath this ground. Maybe he should warn those mourners. Or sue somebody.

1979. Ricky had died the same year as Mom. She had been a February, he an April. Russell thought of this double tragedy in the same fatalistic way he acknowledged that there were always three truths in a row on a true-false quiz. Never fool yourself into believing there is a roof on how much bad news will fit into the fiscal year. Don't try to out fox Mister D.

White ehirt, eober borrowed tie, no jacket. That was how Ricky had been dressed for Mom's funeral. He did not own a suit, let alone a suit colored for an occasion. He had hung next to Russ, his face punched in by loss, his cheer dammed, his voice stilled. A boy who had just lost his mother to mad biology; a boy who had no idea how soon he would play a return gig at this same boneyard, this time, properly attired. A perfect fit in a burial suit, because no one would see the slits and laces. Or the tissue-building gel injected into his eyelids with a syringe to prevent his eyes from appearing eunken. Or the orange dye flushed into his arterial freeway to lend him color. Ricky had never been big on cosmetics. In his open casket he'd looked like a rouged mannequin to Russell. Ricky had been so alive that this stand-in dummy couldn't possibly...

Only the top half of the casket had been open for display. No need for mourners to puzzle his pulverized legs in their neat sleeves of corment.

"I was checking them out, y'know, the lady mourners?"

For one ehocked moment Russell thought Ricky meant the attendees at his own long-ago funeral. He tried to remember whether he had done anything embarrassing or emotional.

"Some wicked assemblies up there. Man, I just

love spikes and black etockings."

"Yeah. Simone plucked one of the boy mourners already."

Ricky cackled. "Fuckin' Simone! Super Nympho. She was always a felony while we barely scraped misdeemeanor. And you left most of the hell up to me. Biig responsibility, brother Russ."

Russell looked, and was not too surprised. Ricky was as exact as the picture of memory could make him...yet faded and vague, in the way color enaphote can bleed to sepia over the years.

Russell sat down heavily. "Know what confounds me, even now?"

"Why your beatin'-off hand is always opposite in the mirror? Sorry."

"That time we got together right after Hal-loween, right before Thanksgiving. Remember?"

"'77; I was twenty-three. And we didn't do a family gathering because that woulda been too gross, with so much of the family six feet under."

"You brought that girl you thought you wanted to marry."

"Adela, yeesir. And you brought Elise. She had dynamite legs. I looked at her legs and thought, hoo-ee, those legs make the rabbit-ear shape for my brother?"

"And we talked about nothing. After a year apart, we all sat in that bloody restaurant and neither of us had a damned thing to say to the other."

"Wasn't normal family vibes. Wasn't a normal family, Russ. You shouldn't sweat that."

"I think about that afternoon a lot. Sorry I didn't say anything more meaningful. I mean, if I'd known how soon you were going to —"

"Forget it. Everybody pulls that shit. Somebody cries and somebody else gets all hysterical and everybody talks about what they should've said sooner. Be-lated good intentions, and they don't tote up to piss, bro. Because if they did, they'd make you feel better for voicing them. But you know *nothing* makes you feel better. That stuff about time healing wounds is bullshit; time just cauterizes, man, and the scars stay. Till you croak. After, even. You and I hatched some grand plots together. Two brothers makin' trouble. Later we drifted. We got different, okay? It was natural, nobody's fault. We did our bit."

"I guess I expected more."

"Everybody always wants more. It's the one constant."

"It just feels funny to say I miss you when we never talked much as adults. While you were alive."

"Fuck adult, who needs it?"

Russell realized he had just said *while you were alive* as casually as saying *pardon me* on a subway.

"Say it, Russ."

"Say what?"

"What you just said you'd feel funny saying, Out loud. Whispers don't count."

His throat thickened and tried to close. Ricky agged him on.

"You cry and I'll fuckin pound you, man."

Russell swallowed, *glump*, likes trying to deep-throat a golf ball. "I miss you, Ricky. I really do. Even though we seemed to lose whatever we had in common."

"I miss you too, Russ-man. Ditto. I do."

Up on the hill the ceremonies ceased and birds began to announce dusk.

"See? Simple. No awaatballs. Now I got a dare for you, big brother."

"A dare?" This abrupt rsversion to boyhood, eleven versus six, helped clear the amotions clouding Russell's eyes and blocking his throat. "How dare you dare me?"

"I dare you to walk up that hill and look down into that open grave, where those mourners are leaving right now. Look into your future."

Russell gave Ricky the finger. "You can noah my hose."

"I'd need an eyedropper. Come on. Don't be a pansy."

"Ooh, your pees thrill me," Russell returned, just fey enough.

"Double dare."

Russell nailed Ricky, dead serious. "Then you owe me a Coke."

"Done."



En route to Valley View's freshest grave Russell flashed on every tawdry horror story he had ever seen or read involving the Dead That Walked.

...revivified corpses, stumping forth, dropping moist clods of maggotty tissue, lust for the living a viridescent, unholy glow in their hollow eye sockets...

Mom had been gone for over a decade, more than enough time for her to meld with the soil as undifferentiated chaff. Ditto Ricky.

And Simone had died *before* Mom, already in mid-decay even as she ceased breathing. Simone had been in too much of a hurry. For everything.

These were not reanimated bodies. They were too close to the romanticizations Russell had imposed on his family from the moment Grandpa had said-

(from the moment that senile basket case who CLAIMED to be Grandpa had said)

-that the family had taken a time-out from being dead. Ricky had said they'd risen especially for Russell. To escort him to his *own* comfy grave, perhaps? Make the family score ten-for-ten?

Maybe it was the shimmering arrogance of this living, but Russell wasn't ready to get auspices with the other former Pitts and spend the next century wondering whether Mister Mort had to take a dump.

Not yet. No. Thanks for asking.

The last of the departing mourners evil-eyed Russell, scowling and blenting easy disapproval. He knew he looked dishevelled at best. He was sweated through, his shirt damp and rank. Dirt streaked him as though he'd been pawing about in some attic.

Up ahead at the gravesite, a lone woman hitched her skirt to kneel and pluck a flower from the lid of the lowered casket. As Russell crested the rise, the sun enveloped her in a blinding corona of red, diminishing her to a stick figure.

"Daddy had to leave," she said.

Ha stopped at the grave's edge. The marker was just a label taped to a peg, so far. It read FARNHAM.

"Daddy left because he didn't want you to see him this way he died. All horrible. Ha didn't want you to remember him that way."

Russell watched Darianna smell the carnation she had appropriated. Her lucent, pale skin had come from Mom; her blue eyes from Grandpa's familial branch.

"Ha's just as stubborn as you. That's how Ricky and I always knew you were his son. Stubborn."

Whenever Russell thought of his late father, the image that predominated was of a mangled, blackened mass. How automotive technology could rearrange meat and bone. Of course his father would not want to be remembered this way, but the image persisted. Stubbornly.

Darriane twirled her flower by its stem. "Russ? I'm cold. You're sweating and I'm freezing to death."

He placed his hands on her bare arms from behind. Darianna's height, exactly. Darianna's hair. She was as heatless as morgue marble. No goose bumps.

"Do you remember the time we made up epitaphs for ourselves? Yours was NOT DEAD - JUST RESTING MY EYES. Remember what mine was?"

Her voice stole in to squeeze his heart. Tears tried to skid down his face again. No sobbing. Just tears.

"I can't." He didn't even know what was carved on her real tombstone.

"Mine was HERE LIES DARIANNE - PLEASE KEEP OFF THE GRASS."

It hadn't been funny then and it wasn't funny now. It summed up her meek and suppressed nature in



a single line architected to be unobtrusive, unimaginative, bland, safe.

"What words should we give Mister Farnham, here? Help me think of something."

"I can't."

"You already said that."

"I can't think of anything. I'm thinking about you." It seemed such a long reach.

She turned and faced him, remaining safely in his grasp. "Funny. I can't think of anything, either. A whole graveyard full of names, and each one has a story. Like our story. And we can't come up with anything to say for Mister Farnham. His relatives sure sold him short. *A good husband. A fine father. A hard worker.* He went into the dirt with hardly a ripple. Then all the mourners go home to eat and watch TV. By nighttime, he's all alone. With no words."

Twilight was inching up. Russell pulled back.

"No, Russ. Hold me. Please? I'm still cold, and it might seem childish to you...but you always gave the best hugs."

"You're an ice cube. Snuggle in."

Sundown was thieving what pitiful heat she almost retained.

Darianne had gone with a thermometer in her mouth, in a dim and cheerless room. Her doctors – the four musketeers of specialized medicine – agreed that her leukemia was most likely congenital. Inherited. Probably. Their bills were much more precise. Darianne had checked out enwrapped in blankets, fighting to keep warm, leopard-spotted by her own poisoned blood, done before she had even started, at twenty-one years.

At her funeral, nameless people tried to soothe Russell by noting how *unfair* Darianne's death had been. But for the best. Probably. He wanted to make all their faces cave in. He wanted to trade all their glad-

handing sympathy and bogus concern for five minutes during which he could have actually helped Darianne, *done* for her. Made some difference he could perceive in retrospect.

Now she was free of fevers at last. He held her and she was as vibrant as kindling. Encroaching darkness helped mask the blotches marring her fine, pale skin.

"Take me down there, Russ."

Mister Mort stood waiting for them.

The caretakers will be locking up now, thought Russell. They'll nab me and I'll get shitcanned twice in one day. Grandpa won't have any more doubloons – or whatever he used to spring my poor white ass.

Darianne was far too recent. Eight years back. The cuts of memory were still fresh and wet. He remembered escorting her on walks, near flowers, when she could no longer bear the dark room and demanded sunlight. There were flowers aplenty at Valley View. She held his hand tightly, her carnation, gently.

Mister Mort dwarfed them. His shadow was imposing. His placement was intentionally outspoken. Big Pitt bucks had paid handsomely for all this cemetery drama.

Dad's grave was full, tamped, pristine. So was Mom's, alongside. Ricky and Simone were back where they had begun the day. The police tape was broken away in many places; it flapped with that sound plastic flags make at used car lots.

Three plots lay open and waiting. Russell blinked and rubbed his face. No, only two: One for Darianne, one for Leaver Millard Mortimer Pitt, alias the wily Grandpa. Russell knew well the spot assigned as his own future resting place. It was blank, stoneless, unexcavated. The ebbing daylight had forced his eyes to fancy a hole there, warm earth beckoning. A final pit

for the final Pitt.

They stood holding hands at the lip of Darianne's grave.

"You have to do it."

Horror vaulted up from his stomach. He released her unliving grasp. "No. Not me. I'm not ready -"

She cocked a brow as though he was loony. In that instant she was alive for him again, no blotches, wondering what trick her goofy big brother was trying this time.

"Not you," she said. "You're not dead. Me." Daintily, she stepped down into the hole. Dirt crumbled atop her shoes. "It's got to be you, Russ. Please? For me?"

He wondered if the scatter of fill dirt would be enough, even including Darianne. There were no shovels or tools. He would have to use his hands.

She kissed him on the cheek, then blended down into darkness. She would not permit him the sight of soil slowly engulfing her. No such ugliness for Darianne. If Russell saw this, he'd remember it, being as very bit as stubborn as his Dad.

Her plot was a rectangle of iron gray against evening black.

Ricky's dars had been to fake Russell into her proximity. Darianne had forever been the shyest. Now he could physically lay her to rest with his own hands, along with his guilt over his inability to save her.

He would remember this. By now he'd learned well that the world sometimes refuses to accommodate even your most thoughtfully prepared itineraries for living.

Burying Darianne for real took an hour of bloodletting toil. By the time Russell was finished it was too dark for him to see the filth caking his own hands.

Dad never manifested again. That would be family pride.



"You're still here."

"Of course, kiddo. Where the hell else?" Grandpa took a deep, soul-fumigating drag on a half-smoked Koal. "Jesus H. Russ, you look like you just crawled out of a grave."

He was dirty, stinky, wobbling and wild-eyed. By comparison, Grandpa, as dogeared and moldy as he was, came off better. Maybe all the coffee had rejuvenated him.

He tapped a few granules of sugar into a fresh cup while Russell slid in opposite. That was another of Grandpa's signature habits - to use less sugar than more coffee he drank.

Russell found his jacket awaiting him. A new waitress - night shift, now - hesitated before serving him. Grandpa's nod told her this guy was okay, never mind how he looks.

"Whadda piece, huh? Bought me cigareets just 'cos I asked nice. She's a sweetie."

Russell scrubbed his face with a paper napkin. It came away black with a smear of blood. He finger-combed and a stray cottonwood leaf spiraled down from his hair.

"Git some business done today?"

Russell nodded. His reflection nodded too, there in the fresh dark coffee.

"Dad never showed."

"You have to give him that, I think, given his circumstances and all."

Adamant about such things, had been Dad. No way death could disrupt his entrenched mindset. Nor could resurrection.

At every family gathering there's always a stubborn one.

Grandpa harrumphed. "As the...er, elder fella here, I think I can speak for your Daddy, Russell. He was surprised you made the effort to come back here every year, doing the thing with the flowers and all. No, wait. Change that. He wasn't surprised a particle. He needed to have that attitude of surprise, but deep inside he already knew you'd do something like that. And he's proud, and he's happy. You proved he could leave the world with no regrets about you, no apprehensions about your ability. And maybe that's why I'm here - to speak for your Daddy. Because some things never get said father-to-son, no matter how momentous they are, not even if you're gifted with a second chance."

"So you said."

"Believe me, I know from experience."

"You said there was stuff you'd never gotten around to telling Dad."

"I did, didn't I?" Grandpa laughed. "Know what? I may never get around to it. I'm dead, after all." He sipped full choke and puffed too voluminously, as though mindful that his window for earthly vices was contracting. "Gotta go get horizontal meself, before midnight tonight."

"Or you turn into a meat loaf, right?" Such a fairy tale rule seemed laughable in the midst of all Russell had experienced. Suitably frivolous.

"I don't know what happens after that."

Russell had been about to ask what happened next. He watched Grandpa dip his head, sad at his prospects, and felt foolish and outgunned. He reached across the table for the first time.

They talked, the old man and his grandson, until very late that night.

"If I come back next year," said Russell, "does this happen all over again? Because if it does, I'm booking my butt to the Bahamas."

A one-second nightmare: The Pitts, all deceased, cruising the beach, looking for him. Yelling his name and attracting attention. Smelling bad.

"I'd bet against that," Grandpa said. "What went on today took a lot of energy. Love. Whatever. Repetition is boring. Maybe something else'll happen. Maybe, some day, your Daddy will see fit to say what he has to."

"I doubt it."

"Me, too. But who knows? It could happen."

It was carrot enough to ensure Russell's punctual return.



Mister Mort watches the old man and the young man say their farewells in the middle of a graveyard, in the middle of the night. They embrace as though this goodbye must last. The sight evokes a peculiar and powerful feeling, an infusion of strength that sizzles from Mister Mort's upstretched fingertip the stone toes of his sandaled feet.

Mister Mort wonders where such potent forces came from. What he feels is new yet comfortable, scary yet pleasant.

The old man steps down into the grave he has occupied for the last seventeen years. His tombstone is starting to show rain wear, and blackening, from the air.

The young man stands for a wordless moment, hands in pockets. He distributes the flowers he has brought, as he has annually for some time now.

Time, the greed of it, the caprice, or lack of it, does not perturb Mister Mort.

The young man completes his ritual and shoulders his jacket. There is still enough time for him to catch a cab to the airport, or to his hotel for a bout of dreamless sleep.

Once the young man is gone, Mister Mort decides to discover things, and his granite feet embed deep prints in Valley View's rich soil.

It is nice to be off the pedestal for a change.

David J. Schow's birthday fell on Friday the thirteenth this year. He spent it at Bronson Caverns in 110 degree heat. Craig Spector sent him New Amsterdam beer all the way from the east coast, for toast drinking purposes. January 1990 saw the release of Dave's first feature, Leatherface, and two interlocking short story collections Seeing Red (Tor books) and Lost Angels (NAL). His story "Red Light" won the 1987 World Fantasy Award and more of his recent short fiction can soon be found in the anthology's Psycho Paths (edited by Robert Bloch) and Ellen Datlow's Blood Is Not Enough II. His latest novel, The Shaft, will be out at the end of the year. Just now he is finishing up two Grand Guignol pieces for off-Broadway, preparing the first SplatPack audio cassette release and working on various teleplays and screenplays. He's slowed down long enough for us to take this picture.



Photo: courtesy of Debra Richardson

20+ Interview

Inside

John Skipp

By
Buddy Martinez

One of horror's new masters sheds his skin and sheds some light on the inner-workings of a Splatterpunk. You may be wondering where Craig Spector is. Well, we thought you'd like to know that: NO, they're not joined together at the hip! We wanted to hear them separately, and took things a little further by putting them in separate issues. So here, for the first time ever, is John by himself! In the next issue of *Iniquities*, we will interview Craig, same questions, and interestingly enough, mostly different answers. This way you get twice the fun.

Have your life and career gone in the direction you had hoped? Do you feel in control of your destiny, or is your destiny in control of you?

Thanks a lot, Bud. So we're starting off with the lightweight questions, and then working our way up to measuring boners? (laughs) Okay. For starters, things never work out the way you'd expect. When I was twenty, I honestly didn't believe that I'd make it to thirty. I mean, if I'd known I was going to live this long, I'd have given up poppers and airplane glue years ago.

But seriously, I'm a strong believer in destiny. I believe that I'm getting to do the work I was put here to do, living the kind of life I was made for. So that's good. But I don't believe you so much control destiny as learn how to ride the sonofabitch. That, and you learn to discern your path.

Because life is constantly throwing these little forks in the road, these little moments of truth and decision. No such thing as stasis. For me, learning to ride has always been about trusting your inner compass, seizing those opportunities to define your life off your own true north. You've got to know, from moment to moment, who



you are. what you're about and where you want to take it. Then, for better or worse, at least you got to define your own terms. But without that trust, you're just lost in the woods.

Overall, I'm pretty happy with the way things are heading. I lucked out. I got an interesting life.

What did you aspire to be in your youth? What did you want to be when you grew up, or did little Johnny run around screaming, "I wanna be a thplatterpunk!"?

I was gonna be a rock star. Actually, I was going for something along the lines of a Frank Zappa/John Lennon genre-spice baby: hugely popular yet utterly nonconformist, resolutely shocking and controversial, etc. So, technically, I guess I've always been a platterpunk at heart. I just used a Strat instead of a Smith-Corona.

What momentous occasions changed those musical goals? What caused the right turn into writing?

You gotta understand, I've been writing monster stories since I was ten years old. Poe set me off, along with old Creepy, Eerie and Vampirella magazines. So there's this weird visible arc of completion to what I'm doing now.

But career-wise, the decision to stop making music boiled down to this: it stopped being fun. And if you're not enjoying the music, then what is the fucking point? I was bored with my lyrics - I had plateaued as a writer and a player - and I was tired of struggling to crack the biz. I had two independent records under my own name, but I didn't know how to sell them, and my music got dated with astonishing speed. Late seventies prog-rock... *yeah!*

Now I'm playing again. And it's great, it's great fun. My tastes have changed - my voice has changed - so it all feels new, and I'm pumped for it again. The biggest change, though, is that working in film and publishing has taught Craig and I how to play the market. We know how to say what we want in a saleable way, and we know how to sell it without compromising his heart. Until you master those little tricks, life in any creative field is bound to result in madness and death.

What were you like as a little kid?

I was like this little eight million year old man. I felt very old, and very sad, and scared of almost everything. It was painfully obvious to me,

pretty much from Day One, that the world had lost touch with its internal compass and gone ekeetering crazily off the path. We had fallen way short of the glory of God. Even as a kid, it bummed me out and pissed me off.

I was also the kind of kid who was very easily and profoundly grossed out by violence, death, decay, injustice, and squoshy things in general. What you might call a *hypersensitive youth*.

That's why horror's worked out so well for me. It's custom-tailored to my needs. You get to confront your demons, kick a little ass, make some waves in the culture at large, and turn an otherwise-paralyzing character disorder into a lucrative career skill.

Horror allowed me to make my peace with the atrocity, without overgiving to it. Eventually I cheered up, stopped being such a winer, and have been a lot happier and more effective ever since.

What in life worries you? The kind of things that keep you up all night with severe attacks of insomnia, gut-wrenching dilemmas and migraine headaches?

Bills. The thought that my kids might fall into a whirling fan or something. The fact that all God's chillens gotta suffer sometimes, and that includes everyone I love.

How do you deal with the large amounts of work that you have and the pressures on you like facing deadlines, schmoozing and the demands placed on top of you by having a family? What's your philosophy for dealing with the pressures and demands?

Basically, I love my work - I love the process of doing my work - and so long as we keep working, we more or less keep up with the load. That's not the problem. We've been under the gun since '84, when we sold *Light at the End*; I've been supporting my family on paperback sales and screenwork ever since.

The most frightening thing in the time that gets stolen from family and friends. That's why, as the demands get more and more intense, I need to learn to waste less time. This is hard for me, because I've never been a *real terrestrial* guy, which is to say that I'm a bit of a fucking flake. I've always been prone to intensive daydreaming; coupled with real hard work, it's the secret of my success.

Have you ever cracked under

pressure?

Well, my mind will go a lot longer than my body will; so sometimes, after a dozen all-nighters or so, I just have to cave in and sleep for awhile. Like maybe twenty-four hours.

The other thing, which people like me tend to forget, is that the creative process is largely the process of emptying yourself into your work. If you don't stop and fill back up again, after a while it's like trying to start a car with no gas. It's really, really foolish to let that happen. And that's the closest I come to cracking.

Do you find collaborating with Craig a crutch or a tool? Is it a way for each of you to pull each other through the hard and demanding times, and give each other moral support? Or is it just easier to have a partner to always fall back on?

Neither. Both. All of the above. Mostly, Craig and I work together because - and this comes back to that destiny thing again - I sincerely believe that I was meant to meet Craig, and that we're playing out a relationship that had to happen. We reinforce each other's strengths and cover each other's auses. We provoke stuff out of each other that would otherwise not appear in the work. We're intensely competitive and cooperative all at once; we call it the spirit of competition.

Because we're both very strong-willed and confident people, we can take the hits that inevitably come with any collaborative effort. And because we're very different people, who've arrived at a lot of the same conclusions, we can see around each other's arguments and approach the work from a broader perspective than either of us might have generated alone.

This plus the fact that it's fun to jam; it takes some of this psychotic talking-to-yourself quality out of writing. In the end, we do it because it works, and because we want to. It's as simple as that.

The reaction from people that read you is extremely split. They either love you or hate you. There's not really a middle ground. Those that love you are in awe of the attack that you choose to take. Those that hate you work find it very offensive. What do you think is offensive?

I'm offended by local community standards. (laughs) By eight years of Reagan and four years of Bush. By

the fact that a bunch of pea-brained, child-molesting, sexually-dysfunctional bigots and haters can somehow declare themselves a Moral Majority without getting laughed out of town. Yes, I'm offended by Jesse Helms. But now I'm just being redundant.

The fact is, a lot of things offend me. I'm just not real interested in restricting their freedom of expression. I think, for example, the MPAA should feel free to randomly select all the cringing housewives and asslicking corporate toadies they want; and from there, that they should feel free to vilify and malign any movie they so desire. No problem. I just don't think the brainscape of a nation should be held hostage to their whims. I'm deeply offended by the brown lipstick skidmarks of an industry forced to suck up to these dweebs. Knuckling under to prudish, petty authority offends me. Chickenshit grovelling and cowardice offend me.

The fact is, there's a movement in this country to get us all back in our cages. It suggests that the verdict on freedom is in, and the word is: FREEDOM KILLS. They're conducting a war on drugs, a war on sexual and reproductive freedom, a war on social experimentation and freedom of speech which they've crudely disguised as a "return to decency".

But that kind of decency is a sham. You prop it up with two-by-fours, like the town Our Hero rides through in a cheesy backlot Western. It has no substance. It has no dignity. Its a screen to hide our sins behind, our petty cruelties and naked violations of power. The fact is, *there can be no dignity without freedom*. They don't care about that. They just want us back in the cage: nice and safe and out of the way.

That's the underlying message of *splat*, as I understand it. DON'T GET BACK IN THE FUCKING CAGE! We'll die in there. We'll choke on our own excrement. Our only hope as a species lies in pressing forward, not pulling back. But we can't be expected to find the answers when our hands are tied behind our necks.

Pise on that. I want to live. You want to offend me? Try to put me in a cage.

What do you say to those people who attack your work? What kind of message are you trying to convey to your

readers, even the ones that don't like you?

Well, ehoot. I don't see any social movement in the wings to make the reading of our stories compulsory by law. If you don't like 'em, don't read 'em. Or do something better. It's up to you.

We're writing for the people who want this stuff, after all. And we're writing for ourselves. We have our reasons for doing it. They have their reasons for buying it. It's all democratic as hell. Writing, in fact, is the way in which I vote in and ratify my worldview. I never wanted anyone to speak for me. I prefer to speak for myself.

So what's the message? That it's okay to think about this stuff; that it's not only okay, but a noble and necessary thing to stare down the darkness and come to know the monster's face. It's your own face, of course; made in God's own image. It's the beautiful and terrifying face of all creation.

The role of the avatar is to move through darkness into light. It's a spiritual journey, and a rite of passage that our culture's attempting to squash and deny. And it's a shame, because most of us spend our whole lives running from the things we don't want to think about, the things we don't want to admit about ourselves and each other. It's crazy. It's living in denial. It's the cage I was talking about a minute ago. It's the root of all our cultural alienation from the real world, and it's what's going to kill us all if we don't observe the wakeup call.

The book we just finished is called *THE BRIDGE*. It's a toxic eco-thriller, and it poses the vital question: what happens when your shit wakes up and decides to bite your ass off? When you live in a disposable culture, you tend to toss shit over your shoulder and never look back. Where'd all the garbage go? "It just went away." Um...sorry, but no. It's all still here. In fact, it was *JUST THINKING ABOUT COMING TO SEE YOU*...

Once again: that's the power of horror. You can do an unmitigated cautionary tale, use the poetically precise language of myth to shine a fucking klieg light on every ingrown hair of our current environmental nightmare. You can tell a potent, savage kind of truth that most oftentimes goes unspoken. You can cut to the chase. You can

cleave to the bone. You can dare to admit just how deep this shit we're in actually runs.

It's the most important job I can think of, as a writer. Then all you have to do is spend the rest of your life hacking it up...

In the past, drug use has been connected with horror, Poe and King among others. Do you think that's true today and do you use hallucinogens to derive some of what you write?

Oh, absolutely. There's no question about it. Drugs will forever be a major part of my generation's priceless cultural heritage. I mean, one of my sisters started me smoking when I was eight. When I came back to the States from Argentina at the age of thirteen, I had already done speeders and smoked a little dope. It was 1970. By the time I got out of junior high, I'd tripped at least fifty times and tried virtually everything else at least once. So had most of my friends. That's just the way it was.

Very early in my creative life, pot became a sort of ceremonial tool, part of my personal religious ritual of creation. Acid as well, though not nearly so frequently. They were the only ones that stuck. A lot of that came from reading the early Castaneda books at the age of fourteen, followed up by stuff like Alan Watts, Rumi, Robbins and Robert Anton Wilson. Plus the fact that, for me, it worked.

Which is not to say that I think the world should dose on crack and smack and ice. Certain body chemistries don't mix with certain drugs, for ehure, and the road to Party Heaven is nipple-deep in human roadkill. But I hold that drugs have a legitimate function that can scarcely be explored in the current bulletit moral climate. For me, it was never just about partying. It was always about parting the veil.

At this point in your career, you've written short stories appearing in many magazines and anthologies, edited your own anthology and written best-selling novels and several scripts, all of which have done extremely well. What other direction are you interested in going? Is there any interest in working outside of the horror genre?

Not per se. My definition of what constitutes horror is extremely broad. The most horrifying film I've ever seen was *FRANCES*, with Jessica Lange. *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA*

John Skipp

Interview

WOOLF? Is way up on the list. SALVADOR. THE RULING CLASS. HOW TO GET AHEAD IN ADVERTISING, which was sort of a blend of THE RULING CLASS and our own short story, GENTLEMEN.

Don't gut me wrong. I love my monsters. And supernatural horror is a world-class sandbox. But there's an awful lot of latitude within my chosen path. There's not a bandwidth of emotion in the human spectrum that can't be sampled and played on the splatterpunk keyboard. No height unreach or depth unplumbed. So why would I want to leave?

You've had a cameo role in NIGHTBREED. Has that prompted an interest in future movie roles, and have you ever acted before?

Well, Craig and I just came off the remake of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. We spent a week as zombies – EEEYAAOW! – and an extra day as biker thugs on the Morning After the Night of the Living Dead. And I'll tell ya: acting is the greatest. Film sets are the greatest. I plan to spend a good bit of the rest of my life in films: acting, writing, directing, scoring.

And you know, it's funny. The thing I love about acting goes directly back to writing: it's the commitment to character. I love just going and being this person for a while and not deviating from that. I love to explore people's lives that deeply.

When you write, you're performing each of those parts in your head, then putting them down on paper and giving each of them the best possible performance. That's the writer's job. To do it physically and in public is just a logical extension of that. And god is it fun.

If you were to separate your life from your work, what would you say are the most interesting aspects aside from your work? Intense hobbies or interests? Sexual fetishes? Things you do well, or don't do well? Social or community involvement such as Save the Ocelot? Bizarre cults, politics, home economics? What would you say are the most interesting aspects of your life along those lines?

Again, everything gets integrated back into the work, so the lines get hard to separate. I guess the best things in my life, apart from my work, would have to be the people. I've spent most of my life out searching for my

tribes, and at this point, I'm feeling pretty well plugged into it.

The thing that links and defines the tribe is a spark that you recognize in each other. It's a spirit thing. It knows no age group, no sex, no race, no cultural or behavioral line of demarcation. I figured out a long time ago that the *worst thing you can do* is to surround yourself with people who agree with you completely. You get stunted. You get turned into a dope. You spend the rest of your life throwing these endless head-nodding festivals, going "yup yup yup" every time one of your boring, unchallenging, know-nothing friends decides to take a verbal dump. A lot of the people I grew up with turned into that: they calcified and homogenized themselves with their opinions, turned into stunted little reprints of each other. It's not that I dislike them for it; I just prefer people with a little more edge. I admire the sparks that fly.

Now I'm watching my kids grow up. My littlest girl, Milkey, turns three this Sunday – she's got the same birthday as Craig, July 18th – and it's just the fuckin' greatest. Seriously. Of all the projects I've ever undertaken, the best one is my family: my relationship with Marianne, and co-creating Melanie and Mike.

The thing you gotta remember is: the books are not the work. The books, like the movies and everything else, are just by-products of the *real* work, which is the second-by-second of my life and making sure that it all plays out. I'm proud of the books, believe me, but I'm just as impressed by the dynamic that allows Craig and I to write the suckers. Even when it's stressed-out and horrible, I love the process. I love my life. That's the bottom fucking line.

When I'm not writing, I like to hang out. Throw small parties for friends. Watch movies. Listen to tunes. Read. Horse around. I like good sex a lot, with Marianne in particular. I like good food and drink. I like my little swimming pool in the summer.

And I like weird adventures, both to have and to write about. That's one thing I'm a stickler about: I am absolutely determined to enjoy my life.

What's it like at home with you? Are you a family man in the classical sense, or are things a bit more unconventional?

Well, let's put it this way. Last night Melanie, my four-year-old, and my brother-in-law Pat and I sat down and watched RE-ANIMATOR together. And we all laughed a lot. We had a really good time. I guess that's a bit unconventional.

But what the hell. We're very protective when it comes to sparing them from physical harm. Horror movies are another story. They're fun. And they teach the vital difference between toy blood and real blood: a difference most grownups seem unable to distinguish. Kids can cope with this stuff. It's educational, it's fun, and it's a nice safe way to introduce them to the reality of honest-to-god horror in the world.

So unless you're dealing with abused children – which is a whole 'nother can of worms – there's no problem. Violent kids come from violent abuse, not from watching Freddie Krueger or Jason or even Rambo. Rating systems aren't for kids; they're for their dinky little candyass parents.

You and Craig have a persona, an attitude you seem to exhibit at conventions, signings and social gatherings. Most people look at it as cockiness or intimidation. Kind of like a rock star. Is this persona intended for media purposes or is it just you? Do you feel you should be treated like a rock star and do you enjoy the treatment?

Yes. I should definitely be treated like a rock star at all times. More perks. More gorgeous women, throwing themselves at my feet. More money. More everything. More *MORE!* I mean, what's not to like?

But seriously: it's just me, man. I'm just having a good time. I like conventions and signings and stuff. I come in pumped. People respond as they're inclined to. I don't think I'm guilty of indiscriminate attitude-mongering. I'm basically pretty accessible.

Unless, of course, you're one of that tiny handful of gossipmongering no-dick weasels who try to build careers out of shooting at mine. They've already defined themselves as our enemies; so as far as I'm concerned, they're fair game.

These are the people who go around saying shit like *splatterpunk is dead*, as if that were anything more than a craven little wish-fulfillment fantasy. These are the people who aren't satisfied to talk; they actually set out to nuke your career, so they can roast

weenies in the flame. They attack you in columns and panels, then backpedal ferociously to your face. They spread genuinely damaging rumors, make up dangerous lies and hope that they stick. You try to ignore them, but they take that as a sign that they are invulnerable. They are pod people. They are scum of the earth, and I'm just now getting around to scraping them off of my life.

But that's a very small and very specific group of pinheads. I get along with most people just fine.

If at the beginning of your career, you had a portrait of yourself done and it served the Dorian Gray purpose, what would it look like now?

It would look better. Happier. Less tormented.

What's the saddest thing that has happened to you, that you feel may have left a few emotional scars?

Actually... sorry. It's none of your business.

Okay. And the happiest?

Boy, what a mean guy. (laughs)

But I'll tell ya...the two best moments I ever had were, a) the moment I knew that I had met my life's mate in Marianne; and b) the moment when our first daughter was born. Other things rate – the day we sold *LIGHT AT THE END*, for major example – but those were the two most astonishing moments that I can remember.

What would you say is your deepest phobia?

A heart attack. I'm pretty sure I'm gonna die that way; and as such, it's pretty scary. I've had chronic chest pains since I was twelve years old: anxiety-related, of course, but they're still kinda terrifying.

Actually, when you get right down to it, I'm scared to death of dying in general. Not of being dead, but of actually grinding through those last few moments of horror and pain. There really isn't a form of dying that I'm all that crazy about. And I think I communicate that pretty successfully through the work. (laughs)

If you could change into any

monster or horror creature at will, which would you choose and why?

God, I don't know. Bill Paxton in *NEAR DARK*. He seemed to be having fun. (laughs) I guess if I was going to be some kind of fantastic creature that does not adhere to the rules of mortal men, I'd probably want to be David Bowie. I mean, I've never met a woman yet who didn't want to crawl all over David Bowie. It's something to shoot for, anyway...that level of attraction, I mean.

At last, the moment of truth. Between you and Craig, who has the largest flesh popsicle/trouser snake/white worm/groin appendage/semeg peg/baloney pony?

Well, me, of course. And it's a doozy. The mighty Simba is long and limba. In fact, whenever conversation turns to the biggest dicks in the field, my name always comes up. So there.

Give me two words that best describe you.

"Big dick." (laughs) Aw, hell. I dunno. "Wotta guy."





Illustrations
By
Rick Lieder

His Two Wives

By
Chet Williamson

I have always had an affinity for Poe. It began when, as a child, I found on my father's shelves, amid the detritus of book club selections from the forties, a rather small, blue-green boxed volume that contained a great many of the tales. This was before my reading had progressed beyond the one-syllable stage, and the words of the stories, though rich with promise, were mostly unintelligible to me. The illustrations, however, impressed themselves upon my pre-elementary imagination, so much so that I saw them in my dreams, and even now they return to haunt me in my midnight visions.

I learned later that the artist was Eichenberg, and from that day to this I have believed that no one came closer to capturing in illustration the spirit of Poe; neither Clarke nor Wegel nor, among the more contemporary artists, Saty, and certainly not Rackham, whose cartoonish attempts are laughable. Only Eichenberg, in his dark and cruel woodcuts, caught the tragic soul of the angelic Virginian, perhaps because he, unlike the others, created his art not with pens or brushes, but with knives.

Years passed before I could read and comprehend the tales, but until that blessed time came, I feasted my eyes upon the pictures, bathing my soul in the black, luminous orbs that were the eyes of Ligeia, wishing that I was the faceless man whose head she cradled in her lap. I shuddered at the ivory smile of Berenice, her huge, drawn face hanging in the darkness of what I would later learn was the narrator's library, he himself prostrate with sorrow, his face on the table before him. And though I did not know the stories, I sensed unerringly that these men grieved because their women had been, or would be, taken away.

There were other illustrations, of course – the Red Death revealing himself to Prospero and the

revelers, the narrator of "The Black Cat" warily eying the sinister feline perched atop a hog'shead of ale, Montresor and Fortunato about to begin their search for the Amontillado – but it was the women who held me in thrall, and with great effort and over many months I deciphered their stories, with a dictionary beside me, like some latter-day Champollion working his way through a later, far more fascinating Rosetta stone.

Slowly the understanding of the stories came over me, the themes of death and parting and return, and in that volume and others I found and read more tales of lost loves – of Eleonora, Morella, Madeline Usher, the lady of the Oval Portrait. Discovering the poetry, I imbibed the liquorous lines of "Ulalume," "Annabel Lee," and "The Raven," sighing along for the lost Lenore, and finally, when I was ten, read "The Philosophy of Composition," in which I learned (perhaps "had reaffirmed" is more to the point) that Poe felt "the death of a beautiful woman" was the most fitting subject for poetry.

I leave it to those who toy with psychoanalysis to determine the source of my own fascination with this particular subject. As Marie Bonaparte dissected Poe, so those who some day read this may choose to do with me. May you be kinder in your judgments than she was in hers. It should benefit you greatly to know that my father and I were deprived of my mother's graces by her death when I was but three years of age. Of her I recall only warm embraces and gay laughter and rooms filled with flowers. After her death I cannot bring to mind a single flower in our house.

As I became enamoured of Poe and his themes, so I became enamoured of the written word, and ought to make it my field of study. Never did I attempt to write fiction, for how could I hope to equal even the poorest offerings of Poe, my master and my god of

prose? But what I could do, and what I did, was to learn all I could about Poe – man, writer, and thinker – and dedicate what feeble powers I could bring to bear to propagate the seeds of his philosophy and art.

I majored in literature, of course, at the University of Pennsylvania, drawn there by the spirit and the scholarship of the late Arthur Hobson Quinn, whose Poe biography is yet unsurpassed. I remained at Penn long enough to earn a Master's degree in American Literature, and took my doctoral studies at Columbia. In both New York and Philadelphia I haunted the sites where Poe had lived and walked, taking frequent trips to both Baltimore and Richmond to immerse myself still more deeply in his presence. My dissertation was *The Lost Love: Eighteenth Century Roots of Poe's Principal Theme*, which saw publication from the press of the University of Illinois. Besides earning me a minor niche in Poe scholarship, it also introduced me to Joanna.

How do I begin to speak of her? By saying that her loveliness, like Eleonora's, "was that of the Seraphim?" Or shall I use Poe's words to describe Ligeia: "In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated...She came and departed as a shadow."

Oh, she was a Poe woman all right, and I knew some fate had brought us together. I met her when she typed my dissertation. I had chosen a typist at random from a list in the student newspaper, and Joanna was the first name that had leapt to my eyes. When I saw her I knew. Even the name was correct. I had sought in vain for a Ligeia to share my life, but Ligeias are non-existent these days, as are Eleonoras and Morellas. Even Madelines are hard to come by. While a senior at Penn I did chance upon a Berenice, but on our first date quickly discovered that she was not a "Behr-a-neece," with all the grace that name suggests, but rather a "Buhr-NEECE," in style as well as in pronunciation. I felt that the appellation of Joanna might be as close as I could come to finding a name similar to those of Poe's women. Surely in this world of unromantic harenness I could find a *soul* no nearer the mark.

Joanna was too pallid, too fragile for most to consider beautiful, but it was that very quality that most attracted me. It was the face of a flower so lovely and delicate that the first frost that touched it would bring it death.

She was only a sophomore of eighteen, I a romantic older man of twenty-five. Although she could not have understood all the subtleties of my work, she complimented it highly, and I, charmed and flattered,

was quick to ask her to dinner. The following evening I discovered the source of her rare and seraphic pallor. She had, she told me, suffered from diabetes since early childhood. Her parents had been extremely protective of her, and as a result she had never known the experiences that other girls of her age had. She was young and sheltered and pure and, I surmised, somewhat sickly, and I looked into her wide, deep, black orbs over which "hung jetty lashes of great length," and knew that I should never find her like again, and determined to make her my own.

It was not until I found a position that I asked her to be my wife, although the event was not long in coming. I chose to accept the offer of a small college in Central Virginia to teach several courses in American literature. Larger stipends were offered elsewhere, but mostly from schools in the western United States, and I was no Julius Rodman to dare the vicissitudes of travel over the mountains, beyond Poe's beloved eastern shore.

So I accepted the Virginian offer, met the cautious parents of my betrothed, and arranged to have her junior year continue at the college to which we would go as man and wife. Joanna had accepted my proposal with little time for reflection. I believe she saw in me both husband and protector, and, as sheltered as she

Oh, she was a poe woman alright, and I knew some fate had brought us together.

had always been, had no confidence in herself concerning the finding of a better mate. This is not to say that she did not love me, for she did, worshipfully at times, and the gods alone know how I returned that love. Like Poe with his tubercular cousin-bride, Virginia, I learned all I could about her illness, even to the extent of administering to her the twice daily injections of insulin she required, that fluid, more precious than the gods' nectar, that preserved her sweet life.

So the years passed. I taught my classes, wrote my papers, and by my fourth year at the college I was permitted to teach a graduate course on Poe, which I did with great relish. Joanna by this time had taken her degree, and, half-fearful to search for any sort of occupation, remained in our little home (cottage, as I always called it, for it was indeed cottage-like, on a seldom-traveled side street fringed by trees) and cared for my husbandly needs, for my days were long and my nights often spent with my studies. Let no one think, however, that our relationship was one, like Mr. and Mrs. Poe's, in which manifestations of love had no place. I performed a husband's duty, and she a wife's. Our tender couplings were necessarily infrequent, owing to the frailty of Joanna's constitution, for her malady was what the physicians referred to as of a

brittle nature, the balance between good health and ill quite tenuous, and apt to be overthrown by nothing more than a slight cold, or even a mild mental upset.

So we loved and lived, somewhat more reclusively than my more upwardly mobile colleagues, but happily and contentedly, until one day, week, month – the exact moment is obscure in my memory – when I detected a change in my dearly beloved wife.

Her dependency on me was slowly, insidiously diminishing. Her greetings upon my daily return were not as warmly concerned as they had been in times past; her acceptance of my ministrations to her well-being were not as total (indeed, she seemed to be almost resentful as I carefully injected her every morn and evening!). She no longer cared to read my papers, and actually professed boredom upon my nightly reading aloud of Poe's verse. I was at last forced to conclude that I was losing the love of my deepest heart.

I am not by nature a jealous man, so the idea of any infidelity on Joanna's part was long in coming, but once it had made its presence known I determined once and for all to ascertain the truth of it. Unbeknownst to Joanna, I reported myself ill one morning, parked the car but a block from our cottage, and discreetly reentered the house, where I secreted myself in one of the two closets (my own, of course) in the bedroom we shared. There amid my tweeds and broadcloths and corduroys I reposed quietly, infinitely patient. I had always been admiringly astounded by the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and the remarkable slowness with which he opened the old man's chamber door and operated his bull's-eye lantern, fearing that I could never equal such supreme stealth. But never before had I a greater reason. So, like the nameless man whose insanity the presence of the old man's vulture eye had claimed, I sat, completely sane but equally still, and waited for what I might discover.

To equivalent amounts of relief and remorse, I discovered nothing. From my land-locked eyrie I heard only the sounds of a vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the refrigerator door opening and closing several times, and the television (a device that I never watched, but had purchased at Joanna's request), upon which were shown that seemingly consisted solely of discussions of the need for women to express themselves in ever more forceful ways, a highly unromantic view of life that I found distasteful even from the few brief snatchings of words and phrases I was able to discern. I must confess myself appalled that my lovingly sheltered wife should be exposing herself to such execrable opinions. But instead of bursting from

my hiding place and declaiming against such rot (an urge that grew in me the more I listened), I maintained my aching posture, listening as Joanna made her lunch, scarcely daring to draw a breath as she came into our room for a brief nap.

But she slept purely, and alone. Neither the phone nor the doorbell disturbed the placidity of our cottage, and late that afternoon when I heard her descending steps on the cellar stairs, I left the closet and exited the house by the rear door, returning to my car where I sat deep in thought, immersed in disquietude. It was then that I came to the only natural conclusion. My wife, my Joanna, had lived for too long.

It had not been destined for her to ride on life's rough current as long as she already had. She would die, and I would know the innermost agonies of the soul, the identical agonies that had tortured Poe. Only mine would be far, far deeper, for besides experiencing the passing of my loved one, I would be responsible for it as well.

The act itself would not be cruel, for would I not

in fact be saving her from the encroachment of a cruel world that seeks to bind the soul of woman even as it mouths the platitudes of liberation? And already Joanna was feeling the cold bite of the first of these chains: dissatisfaction, envy, disobedience.

I would, I considered, not allow such a blossom to be so blighted. It would be better that it should die first.

Resolving to put a plan into action that very evening, before my wife's independence grew to such a degree that she would deny me access to her medication, I thought long and hard, and ultimately devised what I felt to be a perfect solution. That evening, instead of filling her syringe with a small amount of fast-acting insulin and a large amount of long-term, as was prescribed, I reversed the bottles completely, so that a far larger dose of the more powerful fast-acting type would enter her bloodstream. As I prepared the injection site with alcohol, I inquired solicitously if he might care to inject himself for a change, thinking it convenient to have her own fingerprints on the instrument of her death.

Her large liquid eyes flared as if with a challenge, and the effect was like that of a strong light deep at the bottom of the sea. Without a word, she snatched the needle out of my hand, and, with courage born of anger, sank it deeply into her thigh and pressed the plunger home.

I passed most of the evening in my upstairs study, the dull hum of the television on the floor

She snarled at me then,
using harsh, guttural
words that I shall not
commit to paper.



beneath me drawing my attention from my work. At eleven o'clock I closed my books, put away my pen and listened, hearing no sound from beneath. I took from the shelf the poetry volume of the Arnheim Edition of the works, and walked downstairs.

Joanna was sitting in her chair, her eyes unnaturally wide, her face glistening with perspiration. "My dear," I said in mild alarm, "what is the matter?"

She snarled at me then, using harsh, guttural words that I shall not commit to paper. I could plainly see that she was not herself, that the insulin was dulling her senses to a degree it never had before. Food was the only thing that could save her now, but of that her conscious mind had no idea, and such was her mental state that had I even suggested her eating anything, she would have refused on general principles.

So I made no such suggestion, but only smiled, sat on the other end of the room from her, and said, "Perhaps some Poe will make you feel better."

She shook her head roughly and seemed to be trying to spit, but there was no moisture in her mouth. I opened my volume and began to read:

Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine —

When I had finished "To One in Paradise," she seemed more slack-jawed, stupid-looking (to my dismay). I went on:

Ah, broken is the golden bowl! The spirit flown for ever!

"Lenore" ended, and I looked once again at Joanna, who was now as one in a never-ending dream, lost and dying. Oh yes, she was dying, that I could see, and somewhere in the middle of "For Annie" her eyes closed, and she drifted into what I am certain the physicians would term a coma. Then it was that I felt

safe to sit next to her, hold her cooling hand, and do for her what I always hoped would be done for me as my own silent death crept on.

I read her the prose. I read all night, of Eleonora, and Morella, and Berenice, and the Marchesa Aphrodite, and the Ushers, and Ligeia—oh, particularly of Ligeia. And as I read I sorrowed, and finally wept, wept as my love, my life, grew cold and stiff beside me, as, just before dawn, her final sigh streamed from her, a vaporous offering to the gods of Hellas. And it seemed to me as I held her there, my warmth unable to restore her own, it seemed I heard her own sweet voice saying what Ligeia had said—

"Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

I called the ambulance service when the clock struck seven. They were of course far too late, and I explained to them that I had awakened alone in bed just after sunrise, and had hurried downstairs to see what had happened to my wife, and had found her thus. They asked me other questions then and later, and I explained that my wife had, despite my cautions, lately desired to administer her own medications, and that she had apparently erred in the dosage. The post-mortem examination proved my "theory" to be correct, and the death was officially ruled accidental, the investigation closed.

Then came the funeral, and the second, more private service. The first was a sham, for show only. The funeral director had proven susceptible to bribery, as most men will, though I confess it took me far more money to turn his head than I had hoped, and money was no small consideration. I had originally thought of building a new tomb, but found that the cost would have been equivalent to that of constructing a house, and my finances would not bear it.

So instead I turned from the new cemetery (say, rather, *Memorial Park*), on the outskirts of town, and sought the caretaker of the ancient Roman Catholic cemetery several miles distant. I told him quite bluntly that I could not bear the thought of placing my wife's corporeal form into the rank dampness of the earth, but that the cost of a new tomb was prohibitive. Was there not, by any chance, an old and forgotten crypt back in the deeper recesses of the graveyard, one whose family had long since perished, and where I might surreptitiously lay my beloved's casket? A vault to which I could gain access whenever I wished?

He was hesitant, but when I spoke of money he brightened, and led me to the rear of the cemetery where, amid tall obelisks and large stone and marble tombs, he showed me an ancient pile, whose mortar was crumbling in half a hundred places. I squinted to make out the name that the years and the elements had all but eroded from the slab over the portal, and as I read it, I nearly burst out in peals of wild laughter. The name was *Fortunato*, and inwardly I chuckled at both the connection to Poe and the lack of fortune that had brought the family to the sorry estate in which a stranger could let their tomb.

The caretaker opened the heavy metal doors with a large and rusty key, and we entered. By the dying light of day I could see the empty bier in the center of the tomb, the elabs of stone that covered the wall, the small, stained glass window high at the rear of the edifice. No more could I determine — not the names engraved on the slabs, those who slumbered in the thick walls, nor the filth on the floor, the droppings of small animals who, through the decades, had found the chinks in the tomb's armor. I saw only the bier, and, in fancy, Joanna's casket lying atop it. It was ideal in both atmosphere and seclusion, and I hastily sealed the bargain with the caretaker, who gave me the only key.

The mock funeral over, Joanna's grieving and remarkably bitter parents departed, the empty casket lowered into the grave and buried, the funeral director and I proceeded to carry out my plan. At dead of night we loaded Joanna's true casket into a tradesman's van which I had rented to preserve our anonymity — a hearse arriving in darkness at a cemetery would be sure to draw idle stares. We drove it to the Catholic graveyard's gates, and the informed caretaker was prepared to admit us. The three of us bore the casket into the tomb, locked it, and returned to our homes.

I waited a week before I returned to her tomb, a week of anxiety and withheld joy, knowing that the expectation, the waiting, the longing should make that first visit all the more intense, my grief all the more

heartfelt. For I did miss her. Oh, not the Joanna of the twentieth century that she had been becoming, but rather the Joanna-Ligeia-Annabel Lee of the nineteenth century that she had been. So when at dusk a week hence I turned the key, and it grated its decaying fragments against its lock, when I entered and lit the candles I had brought, placing a stick between door and jamb so that I should not be made captive by a sudden gust of wind, when all this was done, I thought then that I had at last realized the depth and height of man's emotions. I felt I had fulfilled my destiny, that Poe and his dreams and his feelings still lived through me. True, "a sepulchre there by the sea" would have been finer, but for a land-locked professor on a small stipend, I felt I had done quite well.

So the months passed, and I visited the tomb of my departed wife, bringing with me my volumes of Poe, reading the works to the enshrouded form within the casket — did I mention that she was enshrouded? Oh yes, wrapped from head to foot, only her face visible, precisely like Wogel's interpretation of Ligeia.

It was six months
after her interment
that I heard the
scratching.

I thought it only fitting. So I eat and read and grieved and epoke to her of times past. On occasion the thought crossed my mind of opening the coffin and gazing into the sleeping face of my beloved, but I did not. In the first place, I had had the lid nailed on, as had been done in the early times, and, in the second, I did not think I could bear to gaze upon the dissolution that must have begun upon my wife's corpse, fearing that it would send me into a paroxysm of recrimination I would find utterly unbearable.

It was six months after her interment that I heard the scratching. It seemed to come — nay, it came — from within the casket itself, and at the first sound of scraping, as of fingernails on satin, I leapt up and investigated, thinking that by chance a mouse or rat had gnawed its way within in the hopes of finding some unspeakable banquet. But the casket was flawless, intact, and I dismissed the sound as autumn leaves blowing on the mortar outside.

The following evening it occurred again, and this time I stiffened, listening, then arose very slowly and moved toward the sound. It was from within the casket, and the knowledge burst upon me like a thunderbolt that *Joanna moved within the grave*, that, impossible as it seemed, *life lay within that nailed casket*.

There was no "weakness of feeble will" in my beloved, but a will so strong that it had kept her alive without air, without sustenance, even while decomposition had begun its evil work.

And then I knew what was needed — a new

vessel into which the life force of my wife could flow, as Ligeia's life force had surged into and overwhelmed Rowena, the narrator's second bride, so that Ligeia could, through her strength of will, her *refusal* to dis, come back and walk among the living. So would Joanna come back, and love me once again. Leaning next to the lid of the casket, I whispered to my love that I would return, then left the tomb, locking it securely.

I went then to a tavern that I frequented on occasion, and there fell into discourse with a coarse but pneumatically constructed female who waited upon the tables there. Her name was Mildred, though she desired to be addressed as Millie, and I had fancied in the past that she had always looked on me with a certain amount of interest, a supposition that proved to be true, so that it was with little difficulty that I persuaded her to accompany me when the tavern closed, urging her to keep our assignation a secret.

As we drove through the night, I spoke to her of love and death, quoting liberally from the master, so that by the time we arrived at the Catholic cemetery, the woman was already in a highly excitable and receptive state. She followed me eagerly through the labyrinth of graves and vaults, laughing vacuously and remarking over and over how "kinky" the whole experience was. When at length we arrived at Joanna's tomb and I unlocked the door, she began to mutter the words, "Oh my God," repeatedly while grasping me in a most undecorous manner. We moved crab-like into the chamber, I lighting a candle, she moaning lasciviously as she discried the casket lying on the bier.

Then I grasped the woman, and she pressed herself against me, mistaking my action for a different kind of passion. I turned her about, held her by the elbows, and cried, "Joanna! She is here! She, for whom you have been waiting!" and thrust the woman toward the casket. Then I whirled about and left the tomb, slamming the ponderous door behind me.

I could hear the startled cries of the woman, even through the massive portal. She shouted certain words that should never appear on paper. The cacophony continued for a short while, and then the harriidan suddenly grew silent. I fancied I heard the screech of nails as the coffin lid broke free, and then a harsh thud. Then...nothing but the wind blowing through the black trees about me, whistling over the stones.

I shuddered at the thought of the metempsychosis that was taking place within the tomb, but at the same time I rejoiced in the thought that even the chains of death were not enough to keep my beloved from returning to me. With trembling hands I un-

locked the door of the sepulchre and flung the portal wide. I nearly screamed at the sight that awaited me.

The lid of the casket was lying on the stone floor of the tomb, and there beside it were the rotting remains of what had been my Joanna. One moldering arm, swathed in the yellowing linen of the grave, reached out toward me, its desiccated fingers seemingly longer than ever they were in life. The face, upturned, was eyeless, those luminous orbs of onyx having long since sunk into the skull. The lips were shriveled and pulled back, showing the shocking whiteness of the perfect teeth. Her nose was nearly gone. Was this, I shrieked to myself, my beautiful Joanna, my child-bride fled before her time? The worms of agony gnawed within my bosom. I would have remained gazing at the riddled corpse until the seas turned dry, had not a slight movement out of the corner of my eye wrested my attention from the grim sight before me.

A figure stepped from the shadows, and with ice running down my backbone I recognized the form as that of the woman whom I had lured to the tomb and shut inside. Yet there was something different about her, something *changed*. She still wore her uniform, which hung loosely on her cow-like frame, her hair still hung long and lank, her large-lipped mouth still remained open, whether in excitement or in the age-old position of this mouth-breather I could not tell.

Then suddenly she turned her face upward so that it was lit from below by the sickly candle's beam, and her eyes at last fell full upon mine. My heart leapt to my throat, and the closing lines of "Ligeia," slightly modified, leapt over it. "Hers then at last, I shrieked aloud, 'can I never – can I never be mistaken – these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my lost love – of the Lady – of the LADY JOANNA!'"

"You're right there, schmuck."

I stiffened, not believing my own ears. "What?" I quavered.

It was Mildred's voice that responded, but with Joanna's inflection. "Part right anyway. We're both in here now."

"Both?..." The worms of anxiety still nibbled at my breastbone.

"Millie and me," the woman replied. "And she knows the whole story now."

"I sure do," the woman went on, but with an abrupt change in the fluidity of tone. "Always thought you were a nice guy, and now I find out you're nothing but a shitheel. Just goes to show you." My jaw waggled as I tried to speak.

I could hear the startled cries of a woman, even through the massive portal.

"Oh, calm down," said the Joanna voice. "Honestly, you look like a gaffed fish."

"But the corpse..." I babbled, quite undone. "What's... who's in there?"

"Nothing's in there. At least not anymore. I got out just in time, you know. You can survive in something like that only so long. At least Millie's in good shape."

"I sure am," the Millie voice said. "A little saggy in the middle, maybe, but hell, there are guys who *like* that."

I felt all at sea. Poe never said what happened after "Ligeia" ended, and the narrator and his love were reunited. I was on my own now, in uncharted territories. "But...I don't understand!"

The Joanna voice answered me. "You never understood. And I wonder if even Poe did, though he certainly knew more than you."

"Knew *what*?" I inquired.

"That women are *stronger*. Poe never brought a man back, not technically speaking, anyway. But he knew you couldn't keep a good woman down. *Will* can keep us alive...if we've got something to stay alive for." She smirked at that.

"You mean...love?" I ventured.

"If you want to think that, go right ahead."

My mind was churning. "What, uh...what happens now?"

"Poor man. Don't know how the story ends, do you? Well, we can promise that things are going to be different. For one thing, you're going to have a new wife in a new body."

I looked at the width of Millie's frame, at her massive curves, at her solid, unsylphlike corporeality, and choked back a sob.

"Tell him about the other thing," the Millie voice said.

"I shall. Millie wants to make the best of this as well. The status of being a professor's wife is alluring -- though I've told her things to the contrary -- but she also has certain needs, needs which were not as great in me."

"What Joanna's saying, honey, is that I'm gonna expect you to put in a lot of sack time. And don't you worry, Joanna, you'll get to like it too."

"I may at that," I heard the Joanna voice say as a soft emile creased Millie's coarse features.

"I ehant be a party to this!" I cried. "You can't make me!"

"True, we can't *make* you," said Joanna. "But if you refuse to participate, Millie will find a letter in your late wife's handwriting stating that you were plotting to kill her by tampering with her insulin."

"Your...handwriting?" I was barely able to stand. My legs had turned to jelly beneath me.

"I think it's time to go home, dear. Don't you?"

A violent firmness stole over me then, and

murder came into my eyes as I stepped toward this elatthern who made a mockery of my love. I had killed once, why not again?

"That's enough, Eddie!" she barked, and it stopped me dead. "I'll have no more of your foolishness now!"

I could not move. In just such a way must Maria Clemm, Poe's mother-in-law, have spoken to him a thousand times, badgering him about his drinking, his inability to find work, his literary pride...and it came to me then that Poe had been *ruled* by women, not only Mrs. Clemm, but by the more subtle presence of his wife Virginia, and by the dozens of literary lionesses with whom he had come in contact over the years.

And at last I knew the anticlimax of "Ligeia." At last I knew what my fate was to be.

I bowed my head before those fiery black eyes, bowed my body as if before a queen, and bowed my voice to a meek, submissive tone as I whispered, "Yes, my dear. Whatever you say."

I married Millie the barmaid, to the extreme surprise of my colleagues and acquaintances, and Joanna's letter naming me as her murderer rests in some safe deposit box unknown to me. It will, however, never be used. I have resigned myself to my lot, and it is easier knowing that it was Poe's as well. My one regret is that I have so little time for the master anymore. As for reading aloud at home, that is a thing forever of the past. Joanna shows no interest whatsoever, as her preoccupations have begun to resemble Millie's, and they have become the greatest of friends, talking to each other constantly (only in my hearing, of course), and giving new meaning to the word inseparable.

Ah well, at least I am busier than ever before. By day I teach, in the evenings I clean, do the laundry, plan the next day's meals, and at night (have I not said that Millie's interests have become Joanna's?) I...

But hold. Let me end with a line from Poe, to show that he is still foremost in my mind. One might say I spend my nights:

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme...

To the moaning and the groaning of the belles.

Chet Williamson's stories have appeared everywhere from The Twilight Zone magazine to Playboy and Omni. His novels Dreamthorpe, Ash Wednesday, Lowland Rider, and The House of Fear have received acclaimed reviews. His novel Reign will be released by Dark Harvest later this year. His short stories have appeared in Night Visions #7, and his new short story The Bookman will appear in the anthology Obsessions.

"Big Books"

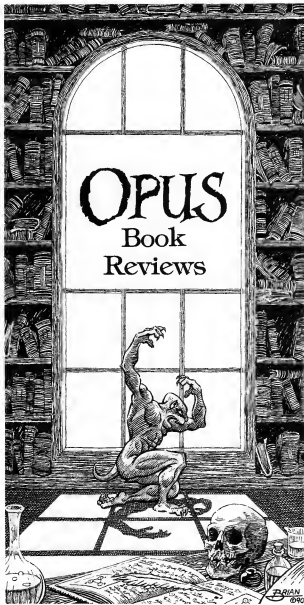
Edward Bryant

As you might expect with any genre field of literature that's in the middle (and some would say shortly before the inevitable decline) of flush times, readers pay special attention to the Big Books. Five of the biggest (whether in terms of physical size, magnitude of sales, or scope of ambition—and sometimes a combination) of 1989 were *MIDNIGHT* by Dean R. Koontz (Putnam), *THE HOUR OF THE WOLF* by Robert R. McCammon (Pocket), *THE DARK HALF* by Stephen King (Viking), *THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW* by Clive Barker (Collins), and *CARRION COMFORT* by Dan Simmons (Dark Harvest).

Life being short and reader patience being limited, I'll restrict myself this time out to offering a few remarks about only two of the above. But the pair I'll cite are among the most interesting and rewarding dark fantasies of the year (*CARRION COMFORT* also fits into that category, but for now it'll have to wait).

Both the King the Barker novels are real challenges for me in my reviewer's persona.

Electing to review the new Stephen King novel is a lot like being an art critic assigned to reassess Mt. Rushmore. When you're dealing with such an American artifact, what can you say? Well, maybe Mr. Lincoln's cheekbone should have been cut a little higher? Mr. Jefferson's nose is just a emidgin too wide? When a writer's sales are numbered in the millions and each new book commands something on the order of ten megabucks, just what is there to say? The publisher and the legions of readers are not exactly hanging on every word from that group of women and men whose task it is to offer informed opinions about new fiction. The author him-



self may well not care.

So why bother at all? Because, dammit, reviewers and critics ought to keep on attempting to inject just a little honesty into the increasingly hyped-up universe of bigger-bucks, globally conglomerated publishing. At least that's my charmingly antiquated and doubtless naive opinion.

Let's just cut to the heart of it. In Stephen King's *THE DARK HALF*, is the emperor wearing any clothes at all? Wouldn't want to disappoint the cynics in the crowd, but the emperor is at least wearing a plaid lumberjack shirt and clean jeans. Every once in a while in this novel, he even dons a tweed jacket.

Stephen King's fiction generally seems more successful when the author is clearly writing material that runs close to the writer's bone. Look at "The Body" and *MISERY*. Observe the first 90% of *PET SEMATARY*. *THE DARK HALF* plunks itself down with a certain amount of rude noise and panache as a solid entry in this canon.

THE DARK HALF is a solid



The Dark Half Stephen King

thematic cousin to *MISERY*. In the latter, a troubled best-selling novelist finds himself kidnapped by his

BIG BOOKS

biggest (in more ways than one) and probably most psychotic fan, and forced to create this crazed reader's dearest literary fantasy. In the former, a troubled best-selling novelist finds himself dogged by the Mr. Hyde-sides of his own divided personality and forced to rejuvenate his darker half's untimely terminated literary career.

In other words, what if Stephen King's deceased literary alter ego, Richard Bachman, came back from the dead, mightily pissed at being dispatched to a premature grave? Don't expect a *roman à clef* here. King handles the fictional parallel to the Bachman affair with a pointedly wry touch.

THE DARK HALF's protagonist, Thad Beaumont, is a less-than wholly-successful literary novelist (though once a National Book Award nominee) who has found considerable fame and prosperity by writing a series of bloody and violent crime novels as "George Stark." After a decade, the Stark identity is compromised by a sleazoid Washington law student who figures out that Stark is Beaumont. The student tries to blackmail this latter. Beaumont and his agent determine to go public. The writer decides it's curtains for his pseudonym. *People Magazine* even prints a staged photo of Beaumont and his wife Liz posing with a tombstone for George Stark. The epitaph on the fake grave marker reads, "Not a Very Nice Guy."

Indeed. There is soon abroad in the world someons or *something* that has clawed its way out of a non-existent grave and seems hell-bent on a series of deadly errands that includes slaughtering anyone who had anything to do with the retirement of the George Stark pseudonym. Beaumont finds himself at first trapped in a Hitchcockian dilemma as the prime suspect. Then things turn nasty...

From the moment the novel

begins with a scene dramatizing the vivid childhood memory many of us, as precocious readers, have from when we pulled down forbidden medical texts from the top shelf and learned about the bizarre things dominant twins can do to their weaker partners *in utero*, there's a warm, homey feel to the story. This conversational, ingratiating informality is practically a registered trademark of the Stephen King writing process. King does quite a good job setting up the novelist's wife and young twins. He also does well with Alan Pangborn, the beset sheriff of Castle Rock, Maine (after all, this is the same community once besieged by the serial killer of *THE DEAD ZONE* and the eponymous rabid St. Bernard of *CUJO*).

Then there's the corporeally realized George Stark himself, a gleefully psychotic killing machine who probably would love to sit down for a couple tall, cool ones with Rex Miller's Daniel "Chaingang" Bunkowski. They'd have a lot of old times to talk over. Stark—both pseudonymous author and character—wields a wicked straight razor, has a gift of phrase (I don't think I've encountered "cock-knocker" before, in either literature or life), lives by the credo, "You don't want to fuck with me, because when you fuck with me you're fucking with the best," and drives a black Toronado bearing the bumpersticker, HIGH-TONED SON OF A BITCH.

If there's a problem with any character in *THE DARK HALF*, it's with the fictional novelist himself. Thad Beaumont too frequently comes across just the way sheriff Pangborn initially perceives him: aloof and distant. Beaumont is at his best when he's terrified for the safety of his family. But the final arbiter, King, seems to shy away when it's time to delve just a little farther into what poor Beaumont ultimately is responsible for in the story's machinations. This should be a novel of character with a gangbusters plot. The plot works just dandy. The other part, the darker

half, is perhaps not dark enough. The tough stuff is too distant.

One important question the novel poses is: who are you when you write? I'd like to have seen more done with this, the issue examined ethically and honestly. But maybe that's just because I'm a writer and I, too, question the true nature of the dark half. I was always fascinated by that key line in *Forbidden Planet*: "Monsters! Monsters! Monsters from the Id." With fiction writers, just what is at the dark heart? *THE DARK HALF* skirts the issue. It needs to grapple.

The *New Yorker's* old editor, Harold Ross, used to advise authors who wrote literary stories about things literary that no one ever cared for stories about writers save for other writers. But *MISERY*, and now *THE DARK HALF*, prove that wrong. In spite of my mild grouching, I'll certainly add both these Stephen King novels to my list of books aspiring storytellers ought to read and ponder.

As for the rest of you who only consume books... Read and wonder.

Now, Hars's another win-

BIG BOOKS

always great to see a major writer repeating his success without slavishly recreating past triumphs. Clive Barker's done that in *THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW*. This panoramic, 70 millimeter eight-track Dolby movie extravaganza of a novel is the summation of everything Barker has written so far. It is evolution in action, and it is wonderful. Of course it's got a few warts disguised as beauty marks, but those are cleverly masked in the all-over dazzle of the execution.

Barker chooses southern California as the primary setting for his recreation and redefinition of modern myth. Palomo Grove is somewhere out there on the distant skirts of L.A.; that's not where the story starts. The beginning is with a dissatisfied man of humble origins. In the early 1970s, Randolph Jaffe is a nobody working in a nothing job. He sorts endless bags of hopelessly misdirected mail at the U.S. Postal Service's Omaha dead letter office. Through serendipitously intercepted communications, he divines the existence of a mysterious organization called the Shoal, as well as hints of Quiditty, an enigmatic dream-ocean, and Ephemeris, the fabulous island floating therein. Most important, he finds in one envelope an exotic medalion. He learns of the Art, a form of power that surpasses most people's dreams.

Jaffe learns to kill in the pursuit of his goal. He finds his way to a closed time-loop in New Mexico where he encounters an ancient shaman named Kissoon. He passes a deserted town with an anomalous steel tower located in the dead center. Discovering the existence of the Nuncio, a god-like transformational process, Jaffe hires a researcher named Fletcher to develop it. The result is the two men, each touched by the gods, mutating into something more than human and being pitted in mortal (immortal?) com-

bat. It's not simply good versus evil—it's more order against chaos. All of this happens in the first few short chapters. Then the novel really swings into action.

We meet the League of Virgins, four young California women who find themselves mysteriously impregnated by the hyper-forms of the Jaff (once Jaffe) and Fletcher. We encounter the children of these supernatural unions as young adults.

Palomo Grove becomes a free-wheeling arena as the Jaff and Fletcher pit their minions against each other—the terate, the worst side of human beings made flesh, and the hallucigenia, human dreams brought to life. Howie, "son" of Fletcher, and Jo Beth, "daughter" of the Jaff, meet—and fall in love.

Levels continue to appear, enigmas continue to unfold. Quiditty is gradually revealed as the last great frontier, the vast, imponderable sea of unconscious dream dividing the Cosm—our world—and the Metacosm, the place where dwells the Iad Uroboros, the dark and implacable foe of all that lives, all that is. Never quite knowing if they are movers or pawns, Barker's characters maneuver to reach Quiditty, to obtain the Art, to open a gateway that will allow the Iad to enter our world.

The players continue to appear. There's Grillo, the burned out journalist, now a star reporter for supermarket tabloids. There is his friend Tesla, a remarkably resourceful and resilient west Hollywood screenwriter. She's one of the best-realized characters in the book. There is Tommy-Ray, the Death-Boy, the Jaff's son and twin to Jo Beth. There is Raul, the transformed ape-into-man. And on and on. Barker's hard-boiled detective Harry D'Amour, investigator of the supernatural, even makes an appearance toward the end. The canvas is broad, the painting surface splashed with an amazing palette of colors. Barker doesn't shy away from either sheer sensuality or treatment of remarkably diverse sexuality.



The Great and Secret Show

Clive Barker

ner, with a resounding "wow." It's

Everything and everyone, of course, are converging upon an apocalyptic confrontation. On the way, they must negotiate all manner of obstacles, from horrendous Hollywood parties to profound reality shifts, both physical and psychological.

The author is playing with myth in an ambitious game that ultimately pays off. It takes a while for the American reader to accustom him — or herself to the reality that this is a British writer re-interpreting America (Barker's knowledge of New Mexico geography isn't all it could be, for example, and the characters are remarkably ignorant when it comes to divining the meaning of the code word, Trinity). But the occasional tin notes of detail rapidly give way to beingsubmerged into the spell, the Art the writer is weaving. It's plain to see that Barker, like J.G. Ballard before him, is fascinated with the textures and con-

BIG BOOKS

traditions of American culture. The alien viewpoint is not always sympathetic—Barker wryly flays all manner of Hollywood conventions—but it's ever-enthralling.

I have a sense that 1988's WEAVEWORLD was something of a trial run for THE GREAT AND SECRET SHOW. Barker's again working at epic length, but with a sure, steadier, more mature hand. Dream and reality are constantly blurring manifestations of the same quality here, not just in terms of the plot, but in the actual narrative itself. It's a startling and mesmerizing effect.

I think Barker has keyed very well into the escalating metaphysics of the New Age '90s. Shamanism and Jungian imagery, those metaphorical cousins, figure prominently in the proceedings. Unlike

other recent novels that have dealt with this sort of trendy material, Barker *shows* rather than tells. He appears to have a real instinct for plumbing the unconscious.

Have I said enough times that this is a good job?

This freestanding first portion of what is presumably a literary diptych (apparently the second half will move from the corrupt Eden of California to the dark canyons of New York), amazes the senses and delights the mind. It is a major work, a millennial fantasy for the '90s and beyond.

Joseph Campbell would have been proud.

Clive Barker ought to be.

And so should we other writers and readers who admire work when it's executed well, and sometimes wax wistful that this field of bright dream and dark nightmare might someday be taken seriously by the world at large.

AFTER HOURS

... devoted *exclusively* to stories that come out after dark! Subscribe tonight!

David B. Silva
The Horror Show

-The magazine is looking sharp. I can't tell you how excited I am that there are magazines like *After Hours* being published today.

Ellen Datlow
Omni

-Thanks for *After Hours* #2 and #3. Looks good.

Chris Lacher
New Blood

-A distinct and impressive debut. When the sun goes down, *After Hours* shines bright!

After Hours #5: An interview with Charles L. Grant. Fiction by Harlan Ellison, Gary A. Braunbeck and D.W. Taylor. Plus Octavio Ramos Jr.'s "Punk Bitch."

Back issues are still available: interviews with Robert R. McCammon, Janet Fox, Chris Lacher, Richard Christian Matheson; excerpts from Robert Dunbar's *The Pines* and Lisa W. Cantrell's *The Ridge*; plus fiction by J.N. Williamson, Steve Rasnic Tem, Tanith Lee, Wayne Allen Sallee, Ronald Kelly, Bobby G. Warner, et al.

[] Sample copy	\$ 4	(specify issue)
[] 1 year (4 issues)	\$14	(specify starting issue)
[] 2 years (8 issues)	\$26	(specify starting issue)

Name

Address

After Hours, 21541 Oakbrook, Mission Viejo, CA 92692-3044.



Midnight Glider

By
Tim Sullivan

Illustrations By
Allen K.

The first time Laura saw her father's ghost, it was only a few days after the funeral. He flew past her bedroom window in silhouette, suspended from his hang glider in a velcro-lined body sock that made him look like a giant dragonfly.

"Daddy?" Laura said, wide awake all of a sudden.

He was gone now, having sailed past the edge of the window frame. Laura knew that she must have been dreaming, but it had seemed so real that she got out of bed and went to the window. The gossamer curtains swirled in the warm night breeze. Leaning on the sill, she looked out and saw nothing but the silent back yard, and the Milligan's fence.

Laura looked up, remembering that a draft could be used to make the glider ascend higher. She saw nothing but the moon over the San Fernando Mountains. It was from one of those very mountains that Daddy had leaped in the last hour of his life.

"Make sure those snaps are secure..." Mommy, blonde hair flying in the wind, had said to the two men helping Daddy ready his glider.

Laura, standing by the flapping crimson windsock, had finished the often heard sentence for her. "...it's a matter of life and death."

"No," Daddy had replied. "It's a matter of fun and more fun."

The two men, a skinny one and a fat one, had laughed and helped him onto the black, wooden ramp that led nowhere. It just ended a few yards out there in space, a sheer dropoff thousands of feet from the ground.

"I think you're all set," the skinny one said.

"Thanks, Abe." Daddy looked so dashing with

his long, black hair and thick mustache. He had a walkie-talkie strapped around his neck, so that he could talk to Laura and Mommy while he was flying. Laura was holding a walkie-talkie, too, waiting for Daddy to jump so she could talk to him. Mommy didn't like it when she said silly things into it, but Daddy did. So Laura always risked her mother's anger and said dumb, giggly things to him while he circled overhead.

Laura and her Mom were standing back by the beige camper they used to convey themselves and the disassembled glider to the top of Mount Kagel every Sunday. The wind was moderately strong, measured at eighteen miles per hour by a little gadget Daddy always brought with him. The San Fernando Valley stretched out in front of them, and Santa Catalina Island rose from the smog in the distance, straight out in front of them to the west; Laura could even see the glittering towers of downtown Los Angeles to the south. Puffy clouds contrasted with the blue, blue sky.

"Bob, could you hang onto that rigging while I get straightened out?" Daddy asked, floundering a bit in the updraft. Laura felt the excitement in his voice. No matter how many times he had done it, hang gliding always got him "juiced," as he liked to say. The rest of the time, he was so calm and quiet, just about as nice as any father she knew. Nicer, even.

He was just about ready to go now. The two men backed away from his white glider, and Daddy stood, leaning forward as he meditated for a moment.

Then he leaned into the wind and ran down the platform. Mommy squeezed Laura's hand, just as she did every Sunday, but Daddy was aloft before he got two-thirds of the way down the ramp.

He caught the thermal updraft easily and

soared over their heads, waving at them. Laura heard the two men clapping, but she didn't look at them. Daddy was smiling down at her as he turned back into the wind. In a few seconds he seemed no bigger than a bird, as he drifted off toward the clouds.

"Hey, sweetie," Daddy's voice crackled out of the walkie-talkie.

"Daddy," she said, "you look like a pigeon."

"Laura . . ." her mother warned.

"Couldn't I be a hawk instead?" Daddy asked.

"Sure, Daddy, anything you want." "How about a buzzard?" Laura laughed, and the banter went on like that as Daddy everted and soared around the mountaintop. Mommy looked on disapprovingly while Laura giggled into the walkie-talkie, until it was time to drive down to the landing field.

They piled into the camper and Mom started it up, Laura still conversing with her father. They journeyed down the dirt road, enormous plumes of dust following them, on their way to watch the end of Daddy's weekly flight. The landing field was really a softball park at the foot of the mountain. The hang gliding club had purchased it to avoid the problem of lighting on private property. Seen from Mount Kagel, it was only a little, green rectangle, but it was big enough to set a hang glider down onto its grassy surface.

Laura chattered away all down the narrow, curved mountain roads, until Mom pulled onto the edge of the landing site. There was Daddy, riding what looked like a paper airplane from here. As he came closer, he kicked his legs out of the body sock's velcro opening.

"Daddy, you've got a tall," Laura said to him over the walkie-talkie.

He reached back and shook the dangling body sock to make it wag. "Shake a tall feather," he said.

"Like a duck!" Laura cried.

"Just call me Daffy Daddy." He tugged at the body sock again.

And then it had happened.

Laura backed away from the window, from the shadowy mountain and the moon, from the terrible memory of her father's death. She backed past her dolls and her stuffed animals, and fell onto her bed. She didn't want to, but she started to cry into her comforter's Raggedy Ann pattern.

At last her Mom opened the bedroom door. Laura hadn't realized it, but her sobbing must have been really noisy, to attract her Mom's attention. She realized all at once that her wailing had been loud

enough to wake the dead.

"It's all right, baby," Mom said, cradling Laura's head against her breast.

"No, it's not all right," Laura said. "I just saw Daddy."

Laura felt her mother's heart beat a little faster.

"What did you say, honey?" Mom asked.

"I saw Daddy fly past my window."

There was a long pause. "You know," her mother said, "that it was only a dream, don't you?"

"I guess so," Laura sniffed. Mom was right. It had to be a dream. Laura might only have been twelve, but she knew that things like this just didn't happen.

But after she had stopped weeping, and after Mom had tucked her in and kissed her, after she was all alone, she remembered that in her most secret heart she had known that her Daddy wasn't gone. Even after seeing the terrible things the fall had done to his head and body, she didn't believe he was gone.

He was dead, yes, but he wasn't gone.

She fell asleep with that thought, but when she woke up, it was still dark. Pitch dark and deathly still outside. Laura felt something warm and wet on the sheets, on her nightgown, on herself. She knew that it had something to do with Daddy, but she wasn't quite sure

Laura backed away from the window, from the shadowy mountains and the moon...

how or why.

Snapping on the lamp, Laura blinked as she threw back the comforter and the sheets. The brightest red she had ever seen stained the sheets and her nightgown.

"Daddy," Laura whispered.

She had run to him after the wing of his glider snapped and tore against a tree branch like a big sheet of paper. Mommy had screamed at her to come back, but Laura knew that he needed her. She had seen him go down among some big rocks a few hundred yards from the landing site, plummeting like a leaf in autumn. It didn't look like he'd crashed that hard, not from so far away.

She'd called out to him, but he hadn't answered, just like the time he had stayed underwater for so long and had gotten everybody scared, and then had popped up with this goofy look on his dripping face.

"Daddy," she cried as she climbed over the rocks, skinning her knee. Mom's cries faded as Laura came over the top of the last boulder and looked down on a gully.

Daddy was down there, on the bleached sand



below. His wings were crushed and the triangular control bar was twisted, and so were his arms and legs. On his harness and white jumpsuit was the same bright, bright red. It came from his face. What was left of his face. Half of it had been torn away, scraped against the rocks, and one eye was gone. The top of his head was laid open, too, mishapen from the collision, something like macaroni showing inside. There were white shards of bone sticking out of the red meat of his side, broken ribs.

And all of a sudden Laura knew that her Daddy wasn't going to fly again, or swim again, or pick her up and hug her again. He was dead.

"No!" she shrieked. "No! No! No! No!"

It was as if she could drive death away. If she just said no enough times, maybe he wouldn't be dead. Or if he had to be dead, at least he wouldn't be gone, not completely gone.

And now she knew that he wasn't. He had come back, just for a moment tonight, just long enough for her to get a glimpse of him, to make her see that he wasn't gone.

And he had done more than that. He had left something of himself inside her. His blood. And she had bled, too, her blood mingling with his. She touched herself down there and lifted her fingers to her face. She smelled it and tasted it.

They were together again now, at least a little

bit.

Should she wake Mommy up and tell her? No, she didn't think so. Mommy would tell her that it was her first period and nothing more. But Laura knew better. This was Daddy's way of telling her that it was just between him and her. It was their secret.

And of course she had to wash her sheets and bed clothes herself, so that Mommy wouldn't know about Daddy's visit. Let Mom think it was a nightmare. That was okay. It was perfect, in fact.

Laura sneaked down to the laundry room and put them in the machine right away, so that the stains would come out. She used extra detergent and bleach, just to make sure.

At school the next day, she was tired, but happier than she'd been in the days since the accident. Daddy wasn't so far away anymore. Even while she was sitting in the classroom, she knew that he was nearby. That hadn't always been true while he was alive. He'd gone to work every day, just like every other daddy, and sometimes he didn't have time for her even after dinner, because he'd had all this stuff to do.

But now all that was changed. She was the only one Daddy cared about now, because she was the only one that knew he wasn't gone.

Mrs. Round, her home room teacher, didn't call on her very often. Laura guessed that Mrs. Round thought she was mourning Daddy. Well, that was all right—the less she had to pay attention to in class, the more she could think about Daddy and what had happened.

But it wasn't that easy at home. Mom just wasn't the same. She stayed at the office later and later, leaving things for Laura to heat up for her dinner. This gave Laura more time to think about Daddy, too, of course, but when Mommy came home things were always bad.

"Hi, honey," Mom said, hanging up her coat and coming into the kitchen. "How was school?"

"Okay," Laura looked into her Mom's eyes and saw something that was never there before the accident. Mom was still pretty, but not like before. Her face was pale, and she was putting on too much make-up lately, which she had never done when Daddy was alive. Laura didn't know exactly what was different, other than that, but it had something to do with Daddy. A lot to do with Daddy.

"I'm pretty tired," Mom said. "I think I'll take a nap."

Laura nodded. At first, after the accident, she had thought Mom blamed her in some way, but now she didn't think that at all. She'd overheard Mom talking to Ellie Milligan on the phone one evening.

"I never should have let him buy that goddamn thing," Mom had said. "I should have put my foot down."

Laura hadn't heard Ellie's reply, but she had

heard Mom crying. "I can't talk," she had said, breaking down. Then she had got off the phone and gone to lie down...in the bed she had shared with Daddy.

Laura had almost given in at that moment, had almost told Mom that Daddy wasn't really gone. But she kept her mouth shut.

Now she was thinking about why she hadn't said anything to Mom that night. She was afraid that if she shared her secret, Daddy wouldn't like it. He might *really* go away then. And if he went away, he might never come back.

Laura couldn't stand that thought. It was best to keep things to herself. As the days turned into weeks, she noticed that she wasn't invited to many parties anymore. She wasn't even invited over to friends' houses to hang out or to eat dinner, or anything. Most of her friends hardly talked to her anymore. It was almost as if the other girls were living in some foreign country, even though she saw them every day. It was like she was watching them on TV; she could almost believe that they weren't really there at all. It didn't matter, though, because she had her Daddy.

But Daddy hadn't come back since that night, and Laura began to worry that he had forgotten all about her.

And then Ellie called one day. When Mom got off the phone, she seemed to have something on her mind. She walked over and sat at the kitchen table across from Laura, who was having milk and Oreos.

"Laura," she said, "Ellie and I are going to see this woman out in Simi Valley."

There was more to it than that, Laura could tell. "Who is she?"

"She's a...person with a power, a kind of witch doctor."

"A witch doctor, like in Africa? I thought they were always men."

"Well, she's from Cambodia, actually. A shaman."

"It sounds kinda weird, Mom."

"Well, that's the idea, honey. Mysteries of the East, you know."

"Oh." Laura supposed that her Mom wanted something to take her mind off things.

"Do you want to come with us?"

Laura didn't answer for a moment. Mom and Ellie went shopping for crystals, or went to see somebody to have their horoscopes charted, tarot cards read, and other stuff like that all the time. It seemed as if Mom was getting into weird things more and more in recent weeks, now that Laura thought about it.

"What's this woman like?" Laura asked.

"I don't know," Mom said. "Why don't we go and find out together?"

Laura didn't know why, exactly, but she said, "All right."

The next evening, half an hour before sunset, they were driving west on the Simi Valley-San Fernando Valley Freeway, a basket of fruit and a bag containing their bathing suits on the seat between them. Neither of them said much.

They were to meet Ellie at the shaman's house. They got off the freeway and drove around in a typical California housing development, little houses made of ticky-tack, as Daddy would have put it. Mom found the house by spotting Ellie's car, at the end of a cul-de-sac right under a freeway overpass. It was a nice house with a garden and a wall going around the side and back.

They went up to the door, located in a little alcove, and Mom rang the bell. A few moments later, the door opened. A little, owlish, Oriental woman stood just inside. She smiled, invited them in, and ushered them into the living room.

Ellie was sitting on the floor, facing another, older woman who sat cross-legged on cushions. The elderly woman was dressed in a sample robe with a blue floral pattern on it. She was plump, and had white hair, and she smiled at them as they entered.

A solemn little boy peered over the second floor balcony, and a bespectacled man came and took him by the hand, leading him away. Mom had said that the shaman lived with her son and his family, but somehow Laura had thought they were going to be a lot less normal. They were just a typical middle-class family, living in a typical suburb of Los Angeles, just like millions of other people, except that they had a witch doctor staying with them.

"This is Renuka," Ellie said, introducing them to the old lady.

Renuka smiled and said, "Welcome," with an accent so thick that, for a few seconds, Laura didn't realize what she had said.

"Thank you," said Mom, handing Renuka the basket of fruit.

While they were exchanging greetings, Laura looked around the room. There was a shelf with a little statue on it. The gold figure wore a peaked hat, and had four faces all on the same head. He also had a lot of extra arms, but before Laura could count them, Mom was pulling her down onto the floor next to her.

Renuka's daughter-in-law brought them each a cold drink. She told them that they could call her Tun and that she would translate Renuka's comments for

But Daddy hadn't
come back since
that night, and Laura
had began to worry...

them.

"Please get into your bathing suits for the Aspergee," said Tun. After they had changed, they were led to a garden in back of the house.

A bowl of warm water was prepared, in which floated the petals of seven differently colored flowers. After lighting joss sticks and praying, they were asked to seat themselves on a wooden stool. The bowl was set on the ground next to Renuka.

"What's she doing?" Laura asked, as the shaman went into a trance.

"Seshh."

Renuka's praying hands began to shake, one palm pushing against the other. Her eyes were shut tight, and her face looked deeply disturbed.

But at last she seemed to come out of it. Her features relaxed, and she began to move her fingers over the petalstrewn water in strange patterns. She gripped Laura's shoulder and pulled her forward, and, with a smaller bowl, began to pour the warm water over her head. It felt good in the chill evening air, and Renuka worked her hands on Laura's head, massaging it as she drew invisible figures in the scalp with her fingertip.

"Now ask the god for what you want," Tun said, care on the freeway overpass hissing behind her in the dark.

What I want. Laura squeezed her eyes closed, and thought about what she wanted more than anything else in the world. *I want my Daddy.*

After she had towed off and got back into her jeans and sweater, Laura was asked to come back inside. Tun explained to her that the god Brahma, whom the four-faced gold statue represented, had been inside Renuka. Now she would bring down a goddess with—at least to Laura—an unpronounceable name.

Renuka went through the hand-clasping contortions again, but they didn't last quite so long and weren't as severe this time. She was smiling now, and Tun explained that this was a very happy goddess.

The goddess—or at least Renuka—beckoned for Laura to lean forward. The old woman rubbed gold leaf off stiff paper and placed it in little, gleaming squares on Laura's forehead, cheeks, and the bridge of her nose.

"Each time she puts gold on your face," Tun said, "ask the goddess to give you what you desire."

As Renuka rubbed the gold into her skin with pleasantly scented oil, Laura wished. She felt something stirring down deep inside her. She prayed that her wish would come true, and the feeling grew more intense.

She forgot about her Mom, and Ellie, and Tun, and even Renuka now. It was just her and the goddess with the unpronounceable name. And if this goddess could grant wishes, then Laura should get hers, after all the tears she'd shed, after she'd spilled blood for her Daddy. Every time the gold went onto her face, she silently pleaded with the goddess for the same, simple thing: *Bring back my Daddy!*

And that was all she would ever ask for. She had begged Jesus at the funeral, and maybe he had helped a little; maybe Daddy wouldn't have been able to glide by her bedroom window like that if Jesus hadn't been asked to do something.

But she had been told that it was wrong to ask Jesus for things. You should pray to him on behalf of other people, but not yourself. So maybe these Asian gods were better.

On the ride home, Laura was quiet.

"Ellie asked me if I thought you had a good time at Renuka's," Mom said as they drove through the passage connecting the Simi Valley with the San Fernando Valley. "Did you?"

"Uh, huh."

"Ellie says that Renuka only practices white magic, so we don't have to worry about anything bad happening." Mom moved the car over into the passing lane.

"Something bad has already happened," Laura said.

That shut Mom up for a little while. Finally, she said, "I know what you mean, honey. And I guess going to a witch doctor's not really a very good way to deal with it."

Laura said nothing to that. She would see.

When they got home, Laura put out a vase of flowers for Brahma and the goddess, and a glass of water, as Renuka had instructed her. This would please the gods, and show them that she really believed in them. If they did what she wanted, she would always worship them, she decided. Through Tun, Renuka had admonished her to be patient. To understand that the blessing of the gods would not come overnight.

But it did.

Daddy glided past her window that night. That very night. She got a better look at him this time, but she wished that she hadn't.

He didn't look like he did before the accident.

He swooped by her window like a bird of prey, and she saw that the skin was stripped off his face and his blood was gleaming in the moonlight. He grinned at her with one side of his face, where the lips were torn away. The gore streamed down his naked body, past where the snapped ribs protruded from his side, all the way to his crotch. The blood red thing that stuck out down there

Daddy glided
past her window
that night. That
very night.

terrified her, but she couldn't take her eyes off of it.

Laura backed away from the window, staring at what was left of her Daddy. The hang glider's immense sail hovered by the window until she fell onto the bed. She rolled over onto her belly and buried her face in the pillows, sobbing.

"Not like this," she cried. "I don't want him to be like this."

She didn't look out the window until dawn, nor did she sleep. In the morning, she told her Mom that she was sick. Mom could tell that she wasn't well just by looking at her.

After Mom had gone to work, and the house was quiet, Laura found that her panties had dried blood on them. She changed them and took a shower, and then went to lie down on the couch. She knew that Daddy wouldn't come to her in the daytime, but she didn't want to look out the window until she'd had time to rest. She had to think about this.

When she woke up, it was mid-afternoon. She was okay now, and she knew what had to be done. As soon as Mom walked in that evening, Laura asked her if they could go back to Renuka's.

"Oh, I don't know, honey," Mom said. "You got sick last night, and I think it might have had something to do with that woman."

That woman?

Whose idea had it been to go there in the first place? This was just like Mom. "It wasn't Renuka's fault," Laura said.

"Well, maybe not. But I don't see what good it will do to go back."

Laura had a quick answer for that. "Ellie said you have to go three times before the magic starts to work."

"Yeah, I guess she did say that," Mom said. "But she also said you have to go when the moon is waxing."

"The *Times* says the moon will be full tomorrow," Laura said, fully prepared for this argument. "That means that if we go tonight and tomorrow, we can just make it."

"Oh, honey."

"Please, Mom! Please just do this one thing for me!"

"Well, I guess I can call Ellie to see if she'll arrange it."

Less than two hours later, Ellie was standing in the doorway, with her coat on. "I've got some flowers in the car for an offering," she said. "Let's hurry, though. The sun is already starting to go down."

Half an hour later, they were at Renuka's, and

as she was asperged, Laura prayed for only one thing—*Bring my Daddy back as he was before he fell.*

This time Renuka had to struggle very hard to bring down the god, and she seemed troubled when she rubbed the gold leaf into Laura's face. It was almost as if she knew what Laura was thinking.

That night, Laura slept on the couch. If it took three visits to Renuka to produce results, she would wait.

"Why don't you want to sleep in your room, honey?" Mom asked.

"I'm afraid I'll have nightmares," Laura said in her most vulnerable, little girl tone. "Can't I stay down here tonight?"

"Of course you can, Laura," Mom said wearily. "But let's not make a habit of it."

Laura slept very little, and there were moments when she thought she heard the creak of the hang glider's deflexor rubbing against the crossbar. Or maybe it was her Daddy's fingernails squeaking against the glass window. She almost got up to see, but fought against the urge. Tomorrow night was the night.

She managed to drag herself to the bus after a fitful night's sleep. She hoped that nothing would happen at school. She hadn't cracked her books in weeks, and the other kids didn't talk to her at all anymore. Not only that, but she had these really bad cramps all day, and she couldn't eat any lunch. All she could think of was what would happen tonight.

One thing did get her attention. Mr. Vega, in science class, said, "Does anybody know what astronomical event is going to happen tonight?"

Nobody did, so he told them: "A total eclipse of the moon."

Could this be right? Laura raised her hand, and Mr. Vega called on her, trying not to look surprised. "Yes, Laura?"

"Isn't it a full moon tonight, too?"

"Yeah, I was coming to that. This is a very rare occurrence, and it'll be happening here on the coast about nine o'clock. If your parents will let you look at it, I think you'll find it a pretty amazing sight."

Then this really was the night, Laura realized. This was a special night when anything could happen.

A few hours later, they all stood together in the cul-de-sac in Simi Valley, everyone but Renuka. She was inside, spiritually preparing herself to receive the godhead.

Her grandson, whom they called Richie, watched the sky with some neighbor kids, and Tun and her

The sail wound
around him like a
shroud, and he descended
into her room.



husband stood with Ellie, Mom, and Laura as the moon rose. Mr. Vega had been right; it was an amazing sight. The moon was huge, and it had turned red with an impenetrable darkness at its core, the shadow of Earth. There was a nimbus around it that alighted off some of the redness, making it appear that the moon was bleeding.

After a while, Laura went inside and changed into her bathing suit for the Asperges. She seemed to feel the rays of the moon on her back as she took the warm, flowered water and Renuka, possessed by the god, made her magical configurations on Laura's scalp.

Make Daddy like he was before the accident, Laura prayed to Brahma, *so that he can come to me tonight.*

And as the gold leaf was rubbed into her face, she begged the goddess to make him a part of her, to be inside her always. By the time the ritual was over, Renuka was exhausted, though she spoke to Laura through Tun for a little while before they left.

"This is getting pretty intense," Ellie car. "I think it's putting quite a strain on Renuka."

"Well, we can't come back until next month," Mom said. "Maybe we should stick to tarot readings."

Both women laughed uncomfortably, but Laura remained silent in the back seat. She understood that they were deeply affected by what had happened, and were dealing with it the best way they could. She looked up at the moon, now a brilliant white disc with a rounded Earth shadow lapping over its upper right hand curve. Soon it would be back to normal, the full

moon restored. And soon her Daddy would be restored to her, and her life would be back to normal.

After Ellie had gone home to her husband Andy and their kids, Laura went to her room. She waited for the sound of Mom's footsteps coming up the stairs. Mom hesitated for a moment, and then came toward Laura's bedroom. She knocked lightly on the door.

"Is everything okay, honey?" she asked as she opened the door and stood on the threshold.

"Mm, hmm."

But she could tell that Mom knew it wasn't okay. Ordinarily, she would have come in to kiss Laura good night. Instead, she said, sort of timidly, "See you in the morning."

"Yeah, Mom, see you in the morning."

Mom shut the door. Now Laura was alone—alone on the night when she would get her Daddy back. For always.

She waited, lying on top of the sheets. Incredibly, she found herself dozing two or three times. But when she opened her eyes, she was always looking straight out the window. The brilliant moon rose higher and higher each time. When would he come?

She looked at the alarm clock on the nightstand next to her bed. Eleven forty-seven. Thirteen minutes to midnight. She stared out the window, not moving a muscle, waiting.

And at the stroke of midnight, he came to her. At first he was no more than a wispy vapor across the face of the white-hot moon, a breeze stirring the curtains. He gathered substance from the night, his silhouette was drawn from the darkness itself. He drifted nearer suddenly, as if seen through a zoom lens. One moment he was a vague, insectile figure, a butterfly pinned by the glider's king post, the mighty wings of his sail unfurled against the stars. And the next moment he was her Daddy, his hands stretched out yearningly, his dark hair streaming in the night wind, his body whole and strong and straight, his handsome face just the way she remembered it.

"Daddy!" she cried. "Daddy, I knew you'd come!"

He opened his mouth to form her name, but she heard no voice, no sound at all. He had to get closer, or Laura must get closer to him. But she couldn't seem to move. She could only wait for him in her bed.

The sail wound around him like a shroud, and he descended into her room. He was looking straight into her eyes, transfixing her, as he silently crept nearer. The wings flapped once and spread from one wall to another and then he was on the bed with her, kissing her, his sandpaper cheek harsh against her soft skin.

"Oh, Daddy," she moaned as he fondled her with his strong hands. He made her feel like a little girl again, like a two-year-old. But his man smell made

other feelings stir and rise to the surface, too, as he touched her everywhere. She was in a fever, his kisses exciting her, his tongue finding hers, his hot weight bearing down on her. She saw the great, white sail over her like a canopy, and she gasped as something penetrated her most tender, secret place.

"Daddy!" she screamed. "Oh, Daddy! Oh, oh, Daddy!"

She felt as if she were dying, quaking and shuddering, lurching her humid loins against his. She heard herself sobbing with pleasure and hurt, almost as if she were outside her own body. But she could feel him deep in her, burning and thrusting. She squeezed her legs around him, trying to hold onto him as she bucked and writhed. She would never let him go, no matter how painful it was to keep him inside her.

He grimaced, his eyes wrinkling into little creases, and groaned as if he remembered his own death. She felt something hot and wet on her leg and then the sharp fragments of a rib popped through his sultry skin against her knee.

Something hot and wet ran onto her lips, and she tasted his blood as half his face tore away to reveal his grinning teeth and empty eye socket. She was awash in blood as it erupted out of dozens of wounds all over his wrecked body.

"No!" she shrieked. "No, Daddy! No!"

He shrank inside her. With no blood left to engorge him, he was getting smaller and smaller. The sail blanketed her, tangling with her sheets as he melted away inside her.

A light slanted across the bed as the last billowing of her sheets settled around Laura's gasping, sweating body.

"Laura!" Mom cried as she rushed into the room. "What's the matter, honey?"

She sat on the edge of the mattress, cradling Laura's head, stroking her sweaty brow. "What happened, sweetheart?"

"Laura..." Laura sobbed. "Daddy...came..."

"Oh, it was a nightmare, baby," Mom said, rocking her gently. "It was only a nightmare."

But Laura knew that it wasn't. Her Daddy had come to her—come in her. And he was still in her! *He would always be inside her!*

"Daddy's gone," Mom said.

"No," Laura said.

"I should have talked to you more about it. I shouldn't have taken you to that woman. You're having bad dreams. You..."

Laura wouldn't listen to any more. She stared at her mother with hatred, and reached down and ran her fingers through the soft, damp down between her legs. And then she lifted her bloody hand and licked it clean. She swallowed her blood. *His blood.*

Mommy screamed, and ran away. She never came into Laura's bedroom again.

Tim Sullivan is the editor of the horror anthology Tropical Chills and is editing his next anthology Cold Shocks. He is the author of the novel Parasite Wars among others.

INIQUITIES

The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder



INIQUITIES
The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder

1-01-0890

157 N. Sierra Bonita Ave. Pasadena, CA 91106

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

☐ Start my subscription with Issue #1

☐ Start my subscription with current issue

Enclosed is \$19.95 US currency for 1 year subscription. ☐ Single copies, \$4.95

Subscribe Now!

In case you haven't already.

Get it all in four big issues a year: fiction, reviews, editorials, and news.

Issue #2 features a brand new, never before published short story by Peter Straub! And it's packed full of everything you see in issue #1, plus more!

And if that's not enough, start your subscription now, using this or a copy of this ad, and you'll be a contender in winning glossy prints of Clive Barker's illustrations in issue #1 for Yattering And Jack, plus one extra illustration never before published! Winners will be the first 200 subscriptions received from time of this announcement. Remember, we must receive this or a copy of this ad to deem your subscription eligible!

So what are you waiting for? Don't be MANGY!
SUBSCRIBE NOW!!!!

Dead Bodies, Hot Babes & Horror

By

Lisa M. Feerick

*Splatterpunk
New Horror
Anti-Horror
Loud Horror*

If I were to pop a vocabulary quiz on the audience of any given horror panel at, shall we say, a long-running regional science fiction convention, I'd be willing to bet that over half of them would think they knew what one and only one of these terms mean. That term would be *splatterpunk*. And, they would most likely be wrong. Single out one amiable, eager fan and he or she will tell you that it is violence, gore, body parts, and mayhem that distinguish "SPLAT" from traditional horror. But should you ask them for the name of a typical *splatterpunk* novel, they'll offer you the name of the latest steak & slash film to hit their local multiplex. At this point, our dour panelists will nod their heads in sage agreement, seizing the opportunity to twist the discussion into a witch-hunt.

Obviously, there are some people missing the point here.

Having achieved the status of Quasi-Veteran horror panelist over the past couple of years, I've absorbed more than my fair share of slanderous, sanctimonious proclamations decrying the New Horror, AKA: *Splatterpunk*, *Loud Horror*, *Anti-horror*, by writers who seem to have a vested interest in deliberately misleading the audience. These guys who try to build convention careers out of grousing are, for the most part, writers who've been so busy churning out so many novelizations of crossword puzzles and gothic romances under pseudonyms that they've failed to really read any of the cutting edge work that's appeared in the past ten years. Indeed, these catty, chatty fellows typically commence fire by enumerating credentials, impressive to few but themselves, which are supposed to give them the right to commandeer a microphone and spew pseudo-academic denunciations of "populist literature". After my last such outing, I came to the conclusion that it's high time for readers to voice their preference with more than just their



Dead Bodies

Photo: Buddy Martinez

book-buying dollars. To, in effect, put their mouths where they're used to putting their money. So let's play a little Q & A and see if we can't get to the bottom of this...

Just who are these horror dudes and dudettes who dare kill somebody in full view of the reader? What do they want? Do they have a hidden agenda, or better yet, a manifesto and a secret handshake? Accusatory articles and pharisaical columns appear regularly in fanzines and the small press equating The New Horror with pornography, anarchism, and the end of Fiction As We Know It. "Quiet" horror writers, from the School of happy endings, get their licks in when they can on genre radio shows, describing the New Horror as nihilistic, and therefore an unremitting downer as a whole. Jeex, I guess I forgot Big Brother's teaching that horror fiction is only supposed to be therapy for those too screwed up to face real life terrors.

So if the self-proclaimed guardians of moral horror don't get the big picture, who does? Easy - the new breed of

reader out there rejecting the dogma every time they plunk down \$4.95. These are readers who won't let another Self-ized bitch-fest slip by without raising a hand gloved in leather to ask, "Hey, what about Skipp & Spector?" (JOHN Skipp and CRAIG Spector, they mean) They're also the folks who constantly ask at those hinky midnight horror panels when the sequel to SILVER SCREAM will come out. They're the folks whose shelves are lined with Dark Harvest, Scream Press, and Zeising limited editions. They're Chris Tarman in Marketing over at Putnam Publishing, who I thought was gonna have a kitten when the limited of BOOK OF THE DEAD was delayed. It's Dori Miller, Ms. Citibank Corporate by day, tattooed metal Chic by night. It's also Saar Banin, Stock Broker Extraordinaire who could bend your ear for hours on matters Nietzschean. They're the people who showed up on opening night for Clive Barker's NIGHTBREED instead of waiting for the tape. They're a little younger, sharper edged, vital individuals who are extremely unlikely to swallow dictum from greying academics who try to tell them that Lovecraft was this century's Poe. They know better than that; they're sure it's Clive Barker. And while they may not be able or willing to produce precise evolutionary diagrams, complete with the seal of approval by the Board of Inana Literary Critics, demonstrating the legitimacy of their chosen flavor of horror, they know what they like and they're buying it. Often.

Adding to this subtle campaign of misinformation is the seemingly passive conspiracy of silence by these writers themselves. They just keep writing them there novels, screenplays 'n stories, pausing occasionally to answer queries when they draw the attention of national forums such as PENTHOUSE, VILLAGE VOICE, and the wider audiences of the non-genre press. Plenty's being written about them and plenty's being said, but I have yet to see the "Splat Pack" confront the issue of this massive, and possibly deliberate, misunderstanding of their work. Are they above all this or something?

I suppose the dilemma this kind of attention creates for a writer (male or female and under forty-- putting out fiction with some on-screen death, a little steamy sex, and maybe a supernatural element or two) is twofold: if you defend yourself by addressing the allegations in kind, you'll appear to be sinking into the murky depths of an intellectual mud-wrestling match the world could easily live without. If you ignore the whole thing and simply participate in projects with other like-minded writers, you'll be accused of creating "homeboy" horror" (Only if you're a boy, of course. The genre critics either ignore loud horror by women or don't want to admit that there are some girls out there who know how to get gross). Great. One way you're a yellow-bellied no talent flash-in-the-pan, and the other you're a member of the nihilistic vaginophobic elite.

Don't you, as a reader, just love this stuff? It's sort of like watching JEOPARDY and feeling the urge to shout the answer to the clinch question that the moronic five-time champ is gonna blow in the final round simply because it's so elementary. You know this type: a whiz who knows the population of Upper Volta circa 1942, but can't tell you who's buried in Grant's Tomb.

Just what is the New Horror, Splatterpunk if you will, if it isn't simply about body counts and forensic detail? More important still, where are the hot babes I advertised



Hot Babes Illustration: N. Taylor Blanchard in the title of this piece? Stand by for a few observations from a gal who's actually read a lot of this stuff. Basically, the edge that the New Horror seems to have over a more traditional, "Quiet," approach is an authenticity of detail, a heightened awareness of sensorial minutiae that you just don't see in novels where the doom and gloom atmosphere relies on vague, indistinct exposition: *that thing going bump in the dark and Stormy night*.

The point of this newer, high definition horror, seems to be to present a unified visual, aural and tactile experience, perhaps to excess. Skipp and Spector have been criticized for presenting a rape scene, essential to the plot, for exactly what rape is: ugly, nasty, repulsive and not the least bit sexually exciting, unless you're Gilles de Rais. This scene struck a real solid chord with some ladies I know who, unfortunately, have had some firsthand experience. They and I reject the reproaches from reader/critics who seemed to feel the scene was too graphic solely because it *didn't* turn them on. By laying it out in cold, nauseating detail S&S crossed a line. Quite a bit in the other direction, I know of a couple with a sentimental weakness for candlelight, who used one steamy page of Dave Schow's "The Falling Man" as a veritable recipe for seduction.

I find it interesting that in all the argument that's been brawling over in the "gore or no gore" corner, not much attention has been paid to the fact that by and large, these new writers are sloughing off the cloak of sexual repression -- ignorance, even traditionally worn by horror. The Gore Movie equation of "sex = death" does not figure in. Instead, characters live and breathe and have sex, just like real life. Goah, imagine that. In truth, "Splatter" films, with their morally censorious attitudes (i.e. you fuck, you die) have more in common with conventional horror than they do with the younger crop of horror writers who appropriated this term.

This erotic element probably works better for these upstarts because sensuality requires an appreciation of real

circumstance in order to evoke a reaction – which just happens to be their forte. I find it hard to get turned on by a *Harlequin* romance; these are not real people, these are not real lives. Ditto *Penthouse* Forum letters (we all know they're made up, but still...). I can, however, really connect with the two young cynics in Dave Schow's "Monster Movie" who have terribly well-developed defense mechanisms. Somehow, lord only knows how, they manage to successfully negotiate each other's romantic mine fields over too many martinis. It works because this voracity stings and amuses simultaneously. Likewise, in *Skipp and Spector's LIGHT AT THE END*, a guy and a girl terribly attracted to each other, opt for an all night cuddle on a couch after a particularly harrowing day, secure in knowing that they can do this sex-thing when the time is right.

Related to the issue of S-E-X, is the big moby question of violence. It's easy to lose track of the debate here when so much breath is being wasted on how much is too much and whether there should be any at all (as if anybody's ever gonna come up with a doctrine accepted by all writers). I believe that there has been, in general, a trend in fiction toward the realistic. It is not so uncommon these days to pick up a Fantasy novel and not get whole Middle-Earths populated by medieval elves in armor, but real folks, like, say a bookstore clerk battling dream vampires in modern Ottawa. Some people feel more comfortable calling this *Magic Realism*; it's that of labeling urge at work again. Call it what you like, but this brand of fantasy does seem to be replacing the excessiveness of the older Heroic form. (now cleverly re-packaged as "High Fantasy") Back in the sixties, mystery fiction saw the evolution of the crime story where sometimes the crime wasn't (GASP!) solved. Sounds like that damned realism thing again.

Now, if in the real world people don't conveniently die from the sight of the rest of us taxpayers, then it does kinda follow that in fiction stressing realism, we will see death, no? Especially if we're talking *horror*. Have the people who carp about all of this death and destruction forgotten that horror frequently deals with death? Well, yeah, that could be it. Perhaps it's time to remind them that we don't live in Oz. Maybe they've gotten so wrapped up in the protective blanket of their slavish devotion to unspeakable things that go bump in the night, well out of our sight, that they've lost touch with this unfortunate, but fundamental truth. As a reader, I find that I can no longer accept yet another novel about evil Templar Knights, drowned towns, or possessed little kids. I need more than nameless dread and sexually repressed protagonists battling thinly disguised representations of Woman-as-Evil to scare me. The *Eyewitness News* at Six is more frightening than the best that the "BOO-of-the-Month Club" has to offer (thank you Joe Lanedals for putting a name to that godawful publishing phenomenon).

The guy who goes mad on the Staten Island Ferry, slaashing his way through tourists on Independence day still exists even after Tom Brokaw describes his reign of terror. These real life Jasons don't sink beneath the moldy waters of Crystal Lake when they're finished for the day. This is what Doug Winter, editor of *PRIME EVIL* and critic, would call Anti-horror: stories where the world isn't restored to the state of innocence enjoyed prior to the onslaught of this horrible element. In these "Anti-horror" stories, everything



Horror: the Splatpack Photo: courtesy of Debra Richardson
isn't alright at the end. The characters bear the scars both physical and psychological. They are inexorably altered, not unlike victims of violent crime. When hero kills monster, what you're left with is a dead and bleeding monster carcass – not some steam on a sidewalk and the possibility that it might have all been a mass hallucination, or worse, a dream...

I suppose, therefore, that it must be a formidable task for a writer to undertake; the frightening of this post-Punk generation of young cynical professionals who've repeatedly viewed *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* to the point where they can eat linguine with red clam sauce during the intestine slurping scene. How to scars such folks? Throw more guts, more dead bodies in their faces? Nah, that's missing the mark by a long shot – although there are plenty of paperback houses trying to do just that with their hologrammed, embossed foil, oleo versions of what they hear is hot. There are even some clever attempts to market what amounts to a basic mystery as *Splat*. Remember Rex Miller's *SLOB*? A book that sold something like a million copies and picked up a fairly meaningless *Stoker Award*? This was a rather straight forward, crime novel, a police-procedural even, with an inflated body count. It was marketed with huge success as *Splatterpunk*. Trust me, when the marketing professionals in publishing jump on the bandwagon, they don't do it because they enjoy losing money. So obviously there's bucks to be made by playing to the audience that buys *New Horror*.

Getting back to just what scares these folks, the sales forces of what the mass market publishers want to reach. I think the issue at hand is the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. It seems to be a lot harder these days to get a reader to buy an elaborate set-up. In fact, I don't think too many of them are shopping in that store anymore. Those *Cuisinart Stalker* novels with astronomical body counts, to me, are just as fanciful as little, gloomy New England hamlets plagued by every supernatural monster which Universal Studios ever made a movie about. If you're going to sell a bill of goods to today's hip, young consumer of horror, you'd better be prepared to play to their skepticism, their cynical romanticism, scaring them despite their meticulously maintained emotional barriers. In short, you

gotta sneak up on them and yell "boo" in a lingo they can comprehend.

Now for a timely word from our sponsor — the free market system — about labels and their uses apropos of horror and the sale of books. Splatpunk started as a kind of joke between a few young writers doing this New Horror. Lots of people know this and tend to forget it, preferring to label it as an attempt to capitalize on some wrongly perceived momentum. As the story goes: Once upon a time, in a city famous for unspeakable horrors, of all things! a party took place called World Fantasy Con. The time is 1986, the place, Providence, Rhode Island. The rage in Science Fiction at the time was the success of William Gibson and the phenomenon known as "Cyberpunk". A bunch of guys were playing with words to describe their particular angle in horror and David Schow came up with the term Splatpunk, a cross between "Splat film", I believe, and "Cyberpunk". Cute, huh? Yeah, well cute caught on and became something of a buzzword. As Cyberpunk before it, Splatpunk became near and dear to the hearts of those wonderfully opportunistic marketing folks at the book companies who are always looking for something new and exciting to tout.

It's been called a movement, a "New Wave", in article after article. Some writers have openly embraced this "movement" they long to be a part of while others have been careful to peel the label off when it gets stuck to them, like discarded chewing gum on a new pair of Capzio's. What we're left with, basically, after you strip away all this contrived assignment to category, is a group of vastly different, younger writers who approach horror from behind with a garrote. Their focus on realistic detail, present in all aspects of the action and narrative, reflects an almost hyper-realistic style. A fair number of these writers are male, but there are women coming up from the small press and other sources too. To label this a white, male, bourgeois moment in the sun, would be to ignore the larger mechanisms at work. The mostly male group of critics who indulge in this sort of terribly easy liberal reactionism do a disservice to the women they're supposedly championing. Women like Nancy Collins, who's novel *SUNGLASSES AFTER DARK* is cited just as often as the output of the Splat Pack by fervent young fans trying to mix it up at another elitist horror panel. And with the exclusive all-female anthology concept getting so much popular support from these self-same critics, I wonder if the boys are beginning to feel oppressed.

Now for a little much needed perspective, folks. The writers of the New Horror will be around as individual talents for a long time while the trend known as "Splatpunk" might possibly be a stylistic phase that they as writers and we as readers are going through together. Overall, not a world-shattering, life-threatening issue is it? If anyone has managed to miss the point here, let me spell it out. Change is generational. What we got on our hands here is the maturation of a younger group of writers who have been influenced by many forms of media, not the least of which is film and, God help us, Rock 'n' Roll (thru "Loud Horror"). Some of them better than others, as in all things. Horror currently enjoys a wide enough audience so the younger crowd can get what they like without encroaching upon the success of the established, more conservative

crowd. We can all have our guilty Sara Lee frozen fudge layer cake and eat it too.

What bothers me most in seeing the genre get mired down in this debate given the more frightening issue of the latest MPAA tendencies toward censorial rating policies bordering on puritanism, the limits that this then places on the independent, innovating producers, the whole ridiculous Mapplethorpe funding argument, and the fact that Jesse Helms lives and breathes. In the sanitized Tipper Gore world of non-communications, fiction is going to be where it's at in terms of free expression. Trust me, horror fiction may be the last place where we can know that when a person gets shot, they die. I don't like the idea of the "quiet" lobby wearing down our resistance to censorship by calling for an end to explicitness in horror fiction. They inadvertently draw attention to the fact that in horror, people get away with a lot of this free expression stuff. I think the Armies of the Night are just waiting for a plausible excuse to expand the argument: "horror films corrupt the minds of children" into a "horror-anything warps everybody" sort of argument. I think rather, that whatever the labels, readers will continue to buy what they like as long as it's available. There'll always be a market for fiction that moves a reader through believable characters, struggling against some conflict either supernatural or human, who suffer the real consequences of the actions the writer chooses to portray.

In essence, what we need here, is for our parents to be patient, taking a minute to remember what it was like when they were feeling the itch to break out of the mold. It may not be music to them, but then again, what did their folks say about the Beatles. And can anybody really manage to read Allen Ginsburg these days?

"Well known strawberry blonde" (Andrew Porter, SFC, quoted), Lisa Feerick, has recently resigned her position with Davis Publications Inc., publishers of Isaac Asimov's Sci-Fi Magazine and Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, in order to pursue her longtime interest in horror which began while she was working as an archeologist in upstate NY. In fact, she is currently hard at work on a novel which features Killer Iriquois Dirt Beavers From Hell. While Iniquities respects her knowledge and insight in the genre, and considers her criticisms astute, we have to wonder a little about her recent career move...



**WHITE SLAVERY,
SADISM, MURDER, AND OTHER**

TRADE SECRETS

THE STARTLING NEW NOVEL BY

RAY GARTON

Trade Secrets, the remarkable new work of horror and suspense by the author of the cult-classic *Live Girls*, is now available in this deluxe hardcover first edition. Jacket artwork by Hugo-nominee *Bob Eggleton*; illustrated frontis and endpapers by award-winning designer *Arnie Fenner*. Trade Edition/\$25.00. Signed/Slipcased/Limited Edition/\$65.00.



ALSO AVAILABLE:

**BY BIZARRE HANDS
BY JOE R. LANSDALE**

The first hardcover collection of work by the *Shamus* Award-winning author of *The Graveyard Book*. 16. Mass-market. 1st ed. (including 2 original to the book). Jacket art by J.K. Potter, whose illustrations by *Arnie Fenner* and *Mark A. Nelson*. Trade Edition/\$25.00. Signed/Slipcased/Limited Edition/\$65.00.

BOOK OF THE DEAD

A landmark anthology of horror in a deluxe hardcover first edition is greatly stories by the dark of *Stephen King*, *Edward Bryant*, *Harvey Campbell*, and more. Introduction by *George A. Romero*. Edited by *John D. Cooney* and *Greg Spector*. Jacket and interior art by *J.K. Potter*. Trade Edition/\$22.00.



Please include \$2.00 with your order for postage for the first book; include 75c for each additional book ordered. Visa and Mastercard orders are welcome and can be placed toll-free by calling 1-800-869-0348. Mark V. Ziesing also sells new and rare books; receive our catalog free when you place an order or send \$1.00 for a sample copy.

MARK V. ZIESING, P.O. BOX 76, SHINGLETOWN, CA 96088



The YATTERING AND JACK

*From the Books Of Blood Vol. 1
Written and Illustrated By*

Clive Barker





The YATTERING AND JACK

From the Books Of Blood Vol. 1
Written and Illustrated By
Clive Barker

WHY THE POWERS (long may they hold court; long may they ehit light on the heads of the damned) had eent it out from Hell to stalk Jack Polo, the Yattering couln't discover. Whenever he passed a tentative enquiry along the system to his master, just asking the simple question, "What am I doing here?" it was answered with a swift rebuke for its curiosity. None of its business, came the reply, its business was to do. Or die trying. And after six months of pursuing Polo, the Yattering was beginning to see extinction as an easy option. This endless game of hide and seek was to nobody's benefit, and the Yattering's immense frustration. It feared ulcers, it feared psychosomatic leprosy (condition lower demons like itself were susceptible to), worst of all it feared losing its temper completely and killing the man outright in an uncontrollable fit of pique.

What was Jack Polo anyway?

A gherkin importer, by the balls of Leviticus, he was simply a gherkin importer. His life was worn out, his family was dull, his politics were simple-minded and his theology nonexistent. The man was a no-account, one of nature's blankest little numbers—why bother with the likes of him? This wasn't a Faust: a pact-maker, a soul-seller. This one wouldn't look twice at the chance of divine inspiration: he'd sniff, ehrug and get on with his gherkin importing.

Yet the Yattering was bound to that house, long night and longer day, until he had the man a lunatic, or as good as. It was going to be a lengthy job, if not interminable. Yes, there were times when even psychosomatic leprosy would be bearable if it meant being invalidated off this impossible mission.

For his part, Jack J. Polo continued to be the most unknowing of men. He had always been that way; indeed his history was littered with the victims of his naivete. When his late, lamented wife had cheated on him (he'd been in the house on at least two of the occasions, watching the television) he was the last one to find out. And the clues they'd left behind them! A blind, deaf and dumb man would have become suspicious. Not Jack. He pattered about his dull business and never noticed the tang of the adulterer's cologne, nor the abnormal regularity with which his wife changed the bedlines.

He was no less disinterested in events when his younger daughter Amanda confessed her lesbianism to him. His response was a sigh and a puzzled look.

"Well, as long as you don't get pregnant, darling," he replied, and sauntered off into the garden, blithe as ever.

What chance did a fury have with a man like

that?

To a creature trained to put its meddling fingers into the wounds of the human psyche, Polo offered a surface so glacial, so utterly without distinguishing marks, as to deny malice any hold whatsoever.

Events seemed to make no dent in his perfect indifference. His life's disasters seemed not to scar his mind at all. When, eventually, he was confronted with the truth about his wife's infidelity (he found them screwing in the bath) he couldn't bring himself to be hurt or humiliated.

"These things happen," he said to himself, backing out of the bathroom to let them finish what they'd started.

"Che sera, sera."

Che sera, sera. The man muttered that damn phrase with monotonous regularity. He seemed to live by that philosophy of fatalism, letting attacks on his manhood, ambition and dignity slide off his ego like rain-water from his bald head.

For his part, Jack J. Polo continued to be the most unknowing of men.

The Yattering had heard Polo's wife confess all to her husband (it was hanging upside down from the light-fitting, invisible as ever) and the scene had made it wince. There was the distraught inner, begging to be accused, bawled at, struck even, and instead of giving her the satisfaction of his

hatred, Polo had just shrugged and let her say her piece without a word of interruption, until she had no more to unbecom. She'd left, at length, more out of frustration and sorrow than guilt; the Yattering had heard her tell the bathroom mirror how insulted she was at her husband's lack of righteous anger. A little while after she'd flung herself off the balcony of the Roxy Cinema.

Her suicide was in some ways convenient for the fury. With the wife gone, and the daughters away from home, it could plan for more elaborate tricks to unnerve its victim, without ever having to concern itself with revealing its presence to creatures the powers had not marked for attack.

But the absence of the wife left the house empty during the days, and that soon became a burden of boredom the Yattering found scarcely supportable. The hours from nine to five, alone in the house, often seemed endless. It the wander, planning bizarre and impractical revenges upon the Polo-man, pacing the rooms, heartsick, companioned only by the clicks and whirrs of the house as the radiators cooled, or the refrigerator switched itself on and off. The situation rapidly became so desperate that the arrival of the midday post became the high-point of the day, and an

unshakable melancholy would settle on the Yattering if the postman had nothing to deliver and passed by to the next house.

When Jack returned the games would begin in earnest. The usual warm-up routine: it would meet Jack at the door and prevent his key from turning in the lock. The contest would go on for a minute or two until Jack accidentally found the measure of the Yattering's resistance, and won the day. Once inside, it would start all the lampshades swinging. The man would usually ignore this performance, however violent the motion. Perhaps he might shrug and murmur: "Subsidence," under his breath, then, inevitably, "*Che sera, sera.*"

In the bathroom, the Yattering would have squeezed toothpaste around the toilet-seat and have plugged up the shower-head with soggy toilet-paper. It would even share the shower with Jack, hanging unseen from the rail that held up the shower curtain and murmuring obscene suggestions in his ear. That was always successful, the demons were taught at the Academy. The obscenities in the ear routine never failed to distress clients, making them think they were conceiving of these pernicious acts themselves, and driving them to self-disgust, then to self-rejection and finally to madness. Of course, in a few cases the victims would be so inflamed by these whispered suggestions they'd go out on the streets and act upon them. Under such circumstances the victim would often be arrested and incarcerated. Prison would lead to further crimes, and a slow dwindling of moral reserves--and the victory was won by that route. One way or another insanity would win out.

Except that for some reason this rule did not apply to Polo; he was unperturbable: a tower of propriety.

Indeed, the way things were going the Yattering would be the one to break. It was tired; so very tired. Endless days of tormenting the cat, reading the funnies in yesterday's newspaper, watching the game shows: they drained the fury. Lately, it had developed a passion for the woman who lived across the street from Polo. She was a young widow; and seemed to spend most of her life parading around the house stark naked. It was almost unbearable sometimes, in the middle of a day when the postman failed to call, watching the woman and knowing it could never cross the threshold of Polo's house.

This was the Law. The Yattering was a minor demon, and his soul-catching was strictly confined to the perimeters of his victim's house. To step outside was to relinquish all powers over the victim: to put

itself at the mercy of humanity.

All June, all July and most of August it sweated in its prison, and all through those bright, hot months Jack Polo maintained complete indifference to the Yattering's attacks.

It was deeply embarrassing, and it was gradually destroying the demon's self-confidence, seeing this bland victim survive every trial and trick attempted upon him.

The Yattering wept.

The Yattering screamed.

In a fit of uncontrollable anguish, it boiled the water in the aquarium, poaching the guppies.

Polo heard nothing. Saw nothing.

At last, in late September, the Yattering broke one of the first rules of its condition, and appealed directly to its masters.

Autumn is Hell's season; and the demons of the higher dominations were feeling benign. They condescended to a nink to their creature.

Indeed, the way
things were going
the Yattering would
be the one to break.

"What do you want?" asked Beelzebub, his voice blackening the air in the lounge.

"This man . . ." the Yattering began nervously.

"Yes?"

"This Polo . . ."

"Yes?"

"I am without issue upon him. I can't get panic upon him, I can't breed fear or even mild concern upon him. I am sterile. Lord of the Flies, and I wish to be put out of my misery."

For a moment Beelzebub's face formed in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"You want *what*?"

Beelzebub was part elephant, part wasp. The Yattering was terrified.

"I--want to die."

"You cannot die."

"From this world. Just die from this world. Fade away. Be replaced."

"You will not die."

"But I can't break him!" the Yattering shrieked, tearful.

"You must."

"Why?"

"Because we tell you to." Beelzebub always used the Royal "we", though unqualified to do so.

"Let me at least know why I'm in this house," the Yattering appealed. "What is he? Nothing! He's nothing!"

Beelzebub found this rich. He laughed, buzzed, trumpeted.

"Jack Johnson Polo is the child of a worshipper

at the Church of Lost Salvation. He belongs to us."

"But why should you want him? He's so dull."

"We want him because his soul was promised to us, and his mother did not deliver it. Or herself come to that. She cheated us. She died in the arms of a priest, and was safely escorted to—"

The word that followed was anathema. The Lord of the Flies could barely bring himself to pronounce it.

"—Heaven," said Beelzebub, with infinite loss in his voice.

"Heaven," said the Yattering, not knowing quite what was meant by the word.

"Polo is to be hounded in the name of the Old One, and punished for his mother's crimes. No torment is too profound for a family that has cheated us."

"I'm tired," the Yattering pleaded, daring to approach the mirror, "Please. I beg you."

"Claim this man," said Beelzebub, "or you will suffer in his place."

The figure in the mirror waved its black and yellow trunk and faded.

"Where is your pride?" said the master's voice as it shrilled into distance. "Pride, Yattering, pride."

Then he was gone.

In its frustration the Yattering picked up the cat and threw it into the fire, where it was rapidly cremated. If only the law allowed such easy cruelty to be visited upon human flesh, it thought. If only. If only. Then it'd make Polo suffer such torments. But no. The Yattering knew the laws as well as the back of its hand; they had been flayed on to its exposed cortex as a fledgling demon by its teachers. And Law One stated: "Thou shalt not lay palm upon thy victims."

It had never been told why this law pertained, but it did.

"Thou shalt not . . ."

So the whole painful process continued. Day in, day out, and still the man showed no sign of yielding. Over the next few weeks the Yattering killed two more cats that Polo brought home to replace his treasured Freddy (now ash).

The first of these poor victims was drowned in the toilet bowl one idle Friday afternoon. It was a petty satisfaction to see the look of distaste register on Polo's face as he unzipped his fly and glanced down. But any pleasure the Yattering took in Jack's discomfiture was cancelled out by the blithely efficient way in which the man dealt with the dead cat, hoisting the bundle of soaking fur out of the pan, wrapping it in a towel and burying it in the back garden with scarcely a murmur.

The third cat that Polo brought home was wise to the invisible presence of the demon from the start. There was indeed an entertaining week in mid-November when life for the Yattering became almost interesting while it played cat and mouse with Freddy the Third. Freddy played the mouse. Cats not being especially bright animals the game was scarcely a great intellectual challenge, but it made a change from the endless days of waiting, haunting and failing. At least the creature accepted the Yattering's presence. Eventually however, in a filthy mood (caused by the remarriage of the Yattering's naked widow) the demon lost its temper with the cat. It was sharpening its nails on the nylon carpet, clawing and scratching at the pile for hours on end. The noise put the demon's metaphysical teeth on edge. It looked at the cat once, briefly, and it flew apart as though it had swallowed a live grenade.

The effect was spectacular. The results were gross. Cat-brain, cat-fur, cat-gut everywhere.

Polo got home that evening exhausted, and stood in the doorway of the dining-room, his face sickened, surveying the carnage that had been Freddy III.

"Damn dogs," he said. "Damn, damn dogs."

There was anger in his voice. Yes, exulted the Yattering, anger. The man was upset: there was

clear evidence of emotion on his face.

Elated, the demon raced through the house, determined to capitalize on its victory. It opened and slammed every door. It smashed vases. It set the lampshades swinging.

Polo just cleaned up the cat.

The Yattering threw itself downstairs, tore up a pillow. Impersonated a thing with a limp and an appetite for human flesh in the attic, and giggling.

Polo just buried Freddy III, beside the grave of Freddy II, and the ashes of Freddy I.

Then he retired to bed, without his pillow.

The demon was utterly stumped. If the man could not raise more than a flicker of concern when his cat was exploded in the dining-room, what chance had it got of ever breaking the bastard?

There was one last opportunity left.

It was approaching Christ's Mass, and Jack's children would be coming home to the bosom of the family. Perhaps they could convince him that all was not well with the world; perhaps they could get their fingernails under his flawless indifference, and begin to break him down. Hoping against hope, the Yattering sat out the weeks to late December, planning its attacks with all the imaginative malice it could mus-

Elated, the demon raced through the house, determined to capitalize on its victory.

ter.

Meanwhile, Jack's life sauntered on. He seemed to live apart from his experience, living his life as an author might write a preposterous story, never involving himself in the narrative too deeply. In several significant ways, however, he showed his enthusiasm for the coming holiday. He cleared his daughters' rooms immaculately. He made their beds up with sweet-smelling linen. He cleaned every speck of cat's blood out of the carpet. He even set up a Christmas tree in the lounge, hung with iridescent balls, tinsel and presents.

Once in a while, as he went about the preparations, Jack thought of the game he was playing, and quietly calculated the odds against him. In the days to come he would have to measure not only his own suffering, but that of his daughters, against the possible victory. And always, when he made these calculations, the chance of victory seemed to outweigh the risks.

So he continued to write his life, and waited.

Snow came, soft pats of it against the windows, against the door. Children arrived to sing carols, and he was generous to them. It was possible, for a brief time, to believe in peace on earth.

Late in the evening of the twenty-third of December the daughters arrived, in a flurry of cases and kisses. The youngest, Amanda, arrived home first. From its vantage point on the landing the Yattering viewed the young woman balefully. She didn't look like ideal material in which to induce a breakdown. In fact, she looked dangerous. Gina followed an hour or two later; a smoothly-polished woman of the world at twenty-four, she looked every bit as intimidating as her sister. They came into the house with their bustle and their laughter; they rearranged the furniture; they threw out the junkfood in the freezer, they told each other (and their father) how much they had missed each other's company. Within the space of a few hours the drab house was repainted with light, and fun and love.

It made the Yattering sick.

Whimpering, it hid its head in the bedroom to block out the din of affection, but the shock-waves enveloped it. All it could do was sit, and listen, and refine its revenge.

Jack was pleased to have his beauties home. Amanda so full of opinions, and so strong, like her mother. Gina more like his mother: poised, perceptive. He was so happy in their presence he could have wept; and here was he, the proud father, putting them both at such risk. But what was the alternative? If he had cancelled the Christmas celebrations, it would have looked highly suspicious. It might even have spoiled

his whole strategy, wakening the enemy to the trick that was being played.

No; he must sit tight. Play dumb, the way the enemy had come to expect him to be.

The time would come for action.

At 3:15 a.m. on Christmas morning the Yattering opened hostilities by throwing Amanda out of bed. A paltry performance at best, but it had the intended effect. Sleepily rubbing her bruised head, she climbed back into bed, only to have the bed buck and shake and fling her off again like an unbroken colt.

The noise woke the rest of the house. Gina was first in her sister's room.

"What's going on?"

"There's somebody under the bed."

"What?"

Gina picked up a paperweight from the dresser and demanded the assailant come out. The Yattering, invisible, sat on the windowseat and made obscene gestures at the women, tying knots in its genitalia.

Gina peered under the bed. The Yattering was clinging to the light fixture now, persuading it to swing backwards and forwards, making the room reel.

"There's nothing there—"

"There is."

Amanda knew. Oh yes, she knew.

"There's something here, Gina," she said. "Some-

thing in the room with us, I'm sure of it."

"No," Gina was absolute. "It's empty."

Amanda was searching behind the wardrobe when Polo came in.

"What's all the din?"

"There's something in the house, Daddy. I was thrown out of bed."

Jack looked at the crumpled sheets, the dislodged mattress, then at Amanda. This was the first test: he must lie as casually as possible.

"Looks like you've been having nightmares, beauty," he said, affecting an innocent smile.

"There was something under the bed," Amanda insisted.

"There's no, body here now."

"But I felt it."

"Well I'll check the rest of the house?" he offered, without enthusiasm for the task. "You two stay here, just in case."

As Polo left the room, the Yattering rocked the light a little more.

"Subsidence," said Gina.

It was cold downstairs, and Polo could have done without padding around barefoot on the kitchen tiles, but he was quietly satisfied that the battle had

Jack looked at the crumpled sheets, the dislodged mattress, then at Amanda.



been joined in such a petty manner. He'd half-fear'd that the enemy would turn savage with such tender victims at hand. But no: he'd judged the mind of the creature quite accurately. It was one of the lower orders. Powerful, but slow. Capable of being inveigled beyond the limits of its control. Carefully does it, he told himself, carefully does it.

He traipsed through the entire house, dutifully opening cupboards and peering behind the furniture, then returned to his daughters, who were sitting at the top of the stairs. Amanda looked small and pale, not the twenty-two-year-old woman she was, but a child again.

"Nothing doing," he told her with a smile. "It's Christmas morning and all through the house--"

Gina finished the rhyme

"Nothing is stirring; not even a mouse."

"Not even a mouse, beauty."

At that moment the Yattering took its cue to fling a vase off the lounge mantelpiece.

Even Jack jumped.

"Shit," he said.

He needed some sleep, but quite clearly the Yattering had no intention of letting them alone just yet.

"*Che sera, sera,*" he murmured, scooping up the pieces of the Chinese vase, and putting them in a piece of newspaper.

"The house is sinking a little on the left side, you know," he said more loudly. "It has been for years."

"Subsidence," said Amanda with quiet certainty, "would not throw me out of my bed."

Gina said nothing. The options were limited. The alternatives unattractive.

"Well maybe it was Santa Claus," said Polo, attempting levity. He paralled up the pieces of the vase and wandered through into the kitchen, certain that he was being shadowed every step of the way. "What else can it be?" He threw the question over his shoulder as he stuffed the newspaper into the wastebin. "The only other explanation—" here he became almost elated by his skimming so close to the truth, "the only other possible explanation is too preposterous for words."

It was an exquisite irony, denying the existence of the invisible world in the full knowledge that even now it breathed vengefully down his neck.

"You mean poltergeist?" said Gina.

"I mean anything that goes bang in the night. But, we're grown-up people aren't we? We don't believe in Bogeymen."

"No," said Gina flatly, "I don't, but I don't believe the house is subsiding either."

"Well, it'll have to do for now," said Jack with

nonchalant finality. "Christmas starts here. We don't want to spoil it talking about gremlins, now do we."

They laughed together.

Gremlins. That surely bit deep. To call the Hellspawn a gremlin.

The Yattering, weak with frustration, acid tears boiling on its intangible cheeks, ground its teeth and kept its peace.

There would be time yet to beat that atheistic smile off Jack Polo's smooth, fat face. Time aplenty. No half-measures from now on. No subtlety. It would be an all out attack.

Let there be blood. Let there be agony.

They'd all break.

Amanda was in the kitchen, preparing Christmas dinner, when the Yattering mounted its next attack. Through the house drifted the sound of King's College Choir, "O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie..."

The presents had been opened, the G and T's

were being downed, the house was one warm embrace from roof to cellar.

In the kitchen a sudden chill permeated the heat and the steam, making Amanda shiver; she crossed to the window, which was ajar to clear the air, and closed

it. Maybe she was catching something.

The Yattering watched her back as she busied herself about the kitchen, enjoying the domesticity for a day. Amanda felt the stare quite clearly. She turned round. Nobody, nothing. She continued to wash the Brussels sprouts, cutting into one with a worm curled in the middle. She drowned it.

The Choir sang on.

In the lounge, Jack was laughing with Gina about something.

Then, a noise. A rattling at first, followed by a beating of somebody's fists against a door. Amanda dropped the knife into the bowl of sprouts, and turned from the sink, following the sound. It was getting louder all the time. Like something locked in one of the cupboards, desperate to escape. A cat caught in the box, or a—

Bird.

It was coming from the oven.

Amanda's stomach turned, as she began to imagine the worst. Had she locked something in the oven when she'd put in the turkey? She called for her father, as she snatched up the oven cloth and stepped towards the cooker, which was rocking with the panic of its prisoner. She had visions of a basted cat leaping

Then, a noise. A rattling at first, followed by a beating of somebody's fists against a door.

out at her, its fur burned off, its flesh half-cooked.

Jack was at the kitchen door.

"There's something in the oven," she said to him, as though he needed telling. The cooker was in a frenzy; its thrashing contents had all but beaten off the door. He took the oven cloth from her. This is a new one, he thought. You're better than I judged you to be. This is clever. This is original.

Gina was in the kitchen now.

"What's cooking?" she quipped.

But the joke was lost as the cooker began to dance, and the pans of boiling water were twitched off the burners on to the floor. Scalding water seared Jack's leg. He yelled, stumbling back into Gina, before diving at the cooker with a yell that wouldn't have shamed a Samurai.

The oven handle was slippery with heat and grease, but he seized it and flung the door down.

A wave of steam and blistering heat rolled out of the oven, smelling of succulent turkey-fat. But the bird inside had apparently no intentions of being eaten. It was flinging itself from side to side on the roasting tray, tossing goutts of gravy in all directions. Its crisp brown wings pitifully flailed and flapped, its legs beat a tattoo on the roof of the oven.

Then it seemed to sense the open door. Its wings stretched themselves out to either side of its stuffed bulk and it half hopped, half fell on to the oven door, in a mockery of its living self. Headless, oozing stuffing and onions, it flopped around as though nobody had told the damn thing it was dead, while the fat still bubbled on its bacon-strewn back.

Amanda screamed.

Jack dived for the door as the bird lurched into the air, blind but vengeful. What it intended to do once it reached its three cowering victims was never discovered. Gina dragged Amanda into the hallway with her father in hot pursuit, and the door was slammed closed as the blind bird flung itself against the panelling, beating on it with all its strength. Gravy seeped through the gap at the bottom of the door, dark and fatty.

The door had no lock, but Jack reasoned that the bird was not capable of turning the handle. As he backed away, breathless he cursed his confidence. The opposition had more up its sleeve than he'd guessed.

Amanda was leaning against the wall sobbing, her face stained with splashes of turkey grease. All she seemed able to do was deny what she'd seen, shaking her head and repeating the word "no" like a talisman against the ridiculous horror that was still throwing itself against the door. Jack escorted her

through to the lounge. The radio was still crooning carols which blotted out the din of the bird, but their promises of goodwill seemed small comfort.

Gina poured a hefty brandy for her sister and sat beside her on the sofa, plying her with spirits and reassurance in about equal measure. They made little impression on Amanda.

"What was that?" Gina asked her father, in a tone that demanded an answer.

"I don't know what it was," Jack replied.

"Mass hysteria?" Gina's displeasure was plain.

Her father had a secret: he knew what was going on in the house, but he was refusing to cough up for some reason.

"What do I call: the police or an exorcist?"

"Neither."

"For God's sake—"

"There's *nothing* going on, Gina. Really."

Her father turned from the window and looked at her. His eyes spoke what his mouth refused to say, that this was war.

Jack was afraid.

The house was suddenly a prison. The game was suddenly lethal. The enemy, instead of playing foolish games, meant harm, real harm to them all.

In the kitchen the turkey had at last conceded defeat. The carols on the radio had withered into a sermon on God's benedictions.

What had been sweet was sour and dangerous. He looked across the room at Amanda and Gina. Both for their own reasons, were trembling. Polo wanted to tell them, wanted to explain what was going on. But the thing must be there, he knew, gloating.

He was wrong. The Yattering had retired to the attic, well-satisfied with its endeavours. The bird, it felt, had been a stroke of genius. Now it could rest a while: recuperate. Let the enemy's nerves tatter themselves in anticipation. Then, in its own good time, it would deliver the coup de grâce.

Idly, it wondered if any of the inspectors had seen his work with the turkey. Maybe they would be impressed enough by the Yattering's originality to improve its job-prospects. Surely it hadn't gone through all those years of training simply to chase half-witted imbeciles like Polo. There must be something more challenging available than that. It felt victory in its invisible bones: and it was a good feeling.

The pursuit of Polo would surely gain momentum now. His daughters would convince him (if he wasn't now quite convinced) that there was something terrible afoot. He would crack. He would crumble. Maybe he'd go classically mad: tear out his hair, rip off

Jack dived for the door as the bird lurched into the air, blind but vengeful.

his clothes; smear himself with his own excrement.

Oh yes, victory was close. And wouldn't his masters be loving then? Wouldn't it be showered with praise, and power?

One more manifestation was all that was required. One final, inspired intervention, and Polo would be so much blubbering flesh.

Tired, but confident, Yattering descended into the lounge.

Amanda was lying full-length on the sofa, asleep. She was obviously dreaming about the turkey. Her eyes rolled beneath her gossamer lids, her lower lip trembled. Gina sat beside the radio, which was silenced now. She had a book open on her lap, but she wasn't reading it.

The gherkin importer wasn't in the room. Wasn't that his footstep on the stair? Yes, he was going upstairs to relieve his brandy-full bladder.

Ideal timing.

The Yattering crossed the room. In her sleep Amanda dreamt something dark flitting across her vision, something malign, something that tasted bitter in her mouth.

Gina looked up from her book.

The silver balls on the tree were rocking, gently. Not just the balls. The tinsel and the branches too.

In fact, the tree.

The whole tree was rocking as though someone had just seized hold of it.

Gina had a very bad feeling about this. She stood up. The book slid to the floor.

The tree began to spin.

"Christ," she said. "Jesus Christ."

Amanda slept on.

The tree picked up momentum.

Gina walked as steadily as she could across to the sofa and tried to shake her sister awake. Amanda, locked in her dreams, resisted for a moment.

"Father," said Gina. Her voice was strong, and carried through into the hall. It also woke Amanda.

Downstairs, Polo heard a noise like a whining dog. No, like two whining dogs. As he ran down the stairs, the duet became a trio. He burst into the lounge half expecting all the hoets of Hell to be in there, dog-headed, dancing on his beauties.

But no. It was the Christmas tree that was whining, whining like a pack of dogs, as it spun and spun.

The lights had long since been pulled from their sockets. The air stank of singed plastic and pine-sap. The tree itself was spinning like a top, flinging decorations and presents off its tortured branches with

the largesse of a mad king.

Jack tore his eyes from the spectacle of the tree and found Gina and Amanda crouching, terrified, behind the sofa.

"Get out of here," he yelled.

Even as he spoke, the television sat up impertinently on one leg and began to spin like the tree, gathering momentum quickly. The clock on the mantelpiece joined the pirouetting. The pokers beside the fire. The cushions. The ornaments. Each object added its own singular note to the orchestration of whines which were building up, second by second, to a deafening pitch. The air began to brim with the smell of burning wood, as friction heated the spinning tops to flash-point. Smoke swirled across the room.

Gina had Amanda by the arm, and was dragging her towards the door, shielding her face against the hail of pine needles that the still-accelerating tree was throwing off.

Now the lights were spinning.

The books, having flung themselves off the shelves, had joined the tarantella.

Jack could see the enemy, in his mind's eye, racing between the objects like a juggler spinning plates on sticks, trying to keep them all moving at once. It must be exhausting work, he thought. The demon was

probably close to collapse. It couldn't be thinking straight. Over-excited. Impulsive. Vulnerable. This must be the moment, if ever there was a moment, to join battle at last. To face the thing, defy it, and trap it.

For its part, the Yattering was enjoying this orgy of destruction. It flung every movable object into the fray, setting everything spinning.

It watched with satisfaction as the daughter twitched and scurried; it laughed to see the old man stare, poyeyed, at this preposterous ballet.

Surely he was nearly mad, wasn't he?

The beauties had reached the door, their hair and skin full of needles. Polo didn't see them leave. He ran across the room, dodging a rain of ornaments to do so, and picked up a brass toasting fork which the enemy had overlooked. Brio-a-brac filled the air around his head, dancing around with sickening speed. His flesh was bruised and punctured. But the exhilaration of joining battle had overtaken him, and he set about beating the books, and the clocks, and the china to smithereens. Like a man in a cloud of locusts he ran around the room, bringing down his favourite books in a welter of fluttering pages, smashing whirling Dresden, shattering the lamps. A litter of broken possessions swamped the floor, some of it still twitching as

Downstairs, Polo heard a noise like a whining dog. No, like two dogs whining.



the life went out of the fragments. But for every object brought low, there were a dozen still spinning, still whining.

He could hear Gina at the door, yelling to him to get out, to leave it alone.

But it was so enjoyable, playing against the enemy more directly than he'd ever allowed himself before. He didn't want to give up. He wanted the demon to show itself, to be known, to be recognized.

He wanted confrontation with the Old One's emissary once and for all.

Without warning the tree gave way to the dictates of centrifugal force, and exploded. The noise was like a howl of death. Branches, twigs, needles, balls, lights, wire, ribbons, flew across the room. Jack, his back to the explosion, felt a gust of energy hit him hard, and he was flung to the ground. The back of his neck and his scalp were shot full of pine-needles. A branch, naked of greenery, shot past his head and impaled the sofa. Fragments of tree pattered to the carpet around him.

Now other objects around the room, spun beyond the tolerance of their structures, were exploding like the tree. The television blew up, sending a lethal wave of glass across the room, much of which buried itself in the opposite wall. Fragments of the television's innards, so hot they singed the skin, fell on Jack, as he elbowed himself towards the door like a soldier under bombardment.

The room was so thick with a barrage of shards it was like a fog. The cushions had lent their down to the scene, snowing on the carpet. Porcelain pieces: a beautifully-glazed arm, a courtesan's head, bounced on the floor in front of his nose.

Gina was crouching at the door, urging him to hurry, her eyes narrowed against the hail. As Jack reached the door, and felt her arms around him, he swore he could hear laughter from the lounge. Tangible, audible laughter, rich and satisfied.

Amanda was standing in the hall, her hair full of pine-needles, staring down at him. He pulled his legs through the doorway and Gina slammed the door shut on the demolition.

"What is it?" she demanded. "Poltergeist? Ghost? Mother's ghost?"

The thought of his dead wife being responsible for such wholesale destruction struck Jack as funny.

Amanda was half smiling. Good, he thought, she's coming out of it. Then he met the vacant look in her eyes and the truth dawned. She'd broken, her sanity had taken refuge where this fantastique couldn't get at it.

"What's in there?" Gina was asking, her grip on his arm so strong it stopped the blood.

"I don't know," he lied. "Amanda?"

Amanda's smile didn't decay. She just stared on at him, through him.

"You do know."

"No."

"You're lying."

"I think..."

He picked himself off the floor, brushing the pieces of porcelain, the feathers, the glass, off his shirt and trousers.

"I think...I shall go for a walk."

Behind him, in the lounge, the last vestiges of whining had stopped. The air in the hallway was electric with unseen presences. It was very close to him, invisible as ever, but so close. This was the most dangerous time. He mustn't lose his nerve now. He must stand up as though nothing had happened; he must leave Amanda be, leave explanations and re-criminations until it was all over and done with.

"Walk?" Gina said, disbelievingly.

"Yes...walk...I need some fresh air."

"You can't leave us here."

"I'll find somebody to help us clear up."

"But Mandy."

"She'll get over it. Leave her be."

That was hard. That was almost unforgivable. But it was said now.

He walked unsteadily towards the front door, feeling nauseous after so much spinning. At his back Gina was raging.

"You just can't leave! Are you out of your mind?"

"I need the air," he said, as casually as his thumping heart and his parched throat would permit. "So I'll just go out for a moment."

No, the Yattering said. No, no, no.

It was behind him, Polo could feel it. So angry now, so ready to twist off his head. Except that it wasn't allowed, ever to touch him. But he could feel its resentment like a physical presence.

He took another step towards the front door.

It was with him still, dogging his every step. His shadow, his fetch; unshakable. Gina shrieked at him, "You sonofabitch, look at Mandy! She's lost her mind!"

No, he mustn't look at Mandy. If he looked at Mandy he might weep, he might break down as the thing wanted him to, then everything would be lost.

"She'll be all right," he said, barely above a whisper.

It was behind him,
Polo could feel it. So
angry now, so ready
to tear off his head.

He reached for the front door handle. The demon bolted the door, quickly, loudly. No temper left for pretense now.

Jack, keeping his movements as even as possible, unbolted the door, top and bottom. It bolted again.

It was thrilling, this game; it was also terrifying. If he pushed too far surely the demon's frustration would override its lessons?

Gently, smoothly, he unbolted the door again. Just as gently, just as smoothly, the Yattering bolted it.

Jack wondered how long he could keep this up for. Somehow he had to get outside: he had to coax it over the threshold. One step was all that the law required, according to his researches. One simple step.

Unbolted. Bolted. Unbolted. Bolted.

Gina was standing two or three yards behind her father. She didn't understand what she was seeing, but it was obvious her father was doing battle with someone, or something.

"Daddy--" she began.

"Shut up," he said benignly, grinning as he unbolted the door for the seventh time. There was a shiver of lunacy in the grin, it was too wide and too easy.

Inexplicably, she returned the smile. It was grim, but genuine. Whatever was at issue here, she loved him.

Polo made a break for the back door. The demon was three paces ahead of him, scooting through the house like a sprinter, and bolting the door before Jack could even reach the handle. The key was turned in the lock by invisible hands, then crushed to dust in the air.

Jack feigned a move towards the window beside the back door but the blinds were pulled down and the shutters slammed. The Yattering, too concerned with the window to watch Jack closely, missed his doubling back through the house.

When it saw the trick that was being played it let out a little screech, and gave chase, almost sliding into Jack on the smoothly-polished floor. It avoided the collision only by the most balletic of maneuvers. That would be fatal indeed: to touch the man in the heat of the moment.

Polo was again at the front door and Gina, wise to her father's strategy, had unbolted it while the Yattering and Jack fought at the back door. Jack had prayed she'd take the opportunity to open it. She had. It stood slightly ajar: the icy air of the crisp afternoon curled its way into the hallway.

Jack covered the last yards to the door in a flash, feeling without hearing the howl of complaint the Yattering loosed as it saw its victim escaping into the outside world.

It was not an ambitious creature. All it wanted at that moment, beyond any other dream, was to take this human's skull between its palms and make a nonsense of it. Crush it to smithereens, and pour the hot thought out on to the snow. To be done with Jack J. Polo, forever and forever.

Was that so much to ask?

Polo had stepped into the squeaky-fresh snow, his slippers and trouser-bottoms buried in chill. By the time the fury reached the step Jack was already three or four yards away, marching up the path towards the gate. Escaping. Escaping.

The Yattering howled again, forgetting its years of training. Every lesson it had learned, every rule of battle engraved on its skull was submerged by the simple desire to have Polo's life.

It stepped over the threshold and gave chase.

It stepped over the threshold and gave chase. It was an unpardonable transgression

It was an unpardonable transgression. Somewhere in Hell, the powers (long may they hold court; long may they shit light on the heads of the damned) felt the sin, and knew the war for Jack Polo's soul was lost.

Jack felt it too. He heard the sound of boiling water, as the demon's footsteps melted to steam the snow on the path. It was coming after him! The thing had broken the first rule of its existence. It was forfeit. He felt the victory in his spine, and his stomach.

The demon overtook him at the gate. He breath could clearly be seen in the air, though the body it emanated from had not yet become visible.

Jack tried to open the gate, but the Yattering slammed it shut.

"*Che sera, sera*," said Jack.

The Yattering could bear it no longer. He took Jack's head in his hands, intending to crush the fragile bone to dust.

The touch was its second sin; and it agonized the Yattering beyond endurance. It bayed like a banshee and reeled away from the contact, sliding in the snow and falling on its back.

It knew its mistake. The lessons it had beaten into it came hurtling back. It knew the punishment too, for leaving the house, for touching the man. It was bound to a new lord, enslaved to this idiot-creature standing over it.

Polo had won.

He was laughing, watching the way the outline of the demon formed in the snow on the path. Like

Yattering

a photograph developing on a sheet of paper, the image of the fury came clear. The law was taking its toll. The Yattering could never hide from its master again. There it was, plain to Polo's eyes, in all its charmless glory. Maroon flesh and bright lidless eye, arms flailing, tail thrashing the snow to slush.

"You bastard," it said. Its accent had an Australian lilt.

"You will not speak unless spoken to," said Polo, with quiet, but absolute, authority. "Understood?"

The lidless eye clouded with humility.

"Yes." The Yattering said.

"Yes, Mister Polo."

"Yes, Mister Polo."

Its tail slipped between its legs like that of a whipped dog.

"You may stand."

"Thank you, Mr. Polo."

It stood. Not a pleasant sight, but one Jack rejoiced in nevertheless.

"They'll have you yet," said the Yattering.

"Who will?"

"You know," it said, hesitantly.

"Name them."

"Beelzebub," it answered, proud to name its old master. "The powers. Hell itself."

"I don't think so," Polo mused. "Not with you bound to me as proof of my skills. Aren't I the better of them?"

The eye looked sullen.

"Aren't I?"

"Yes," it conceded bitterly. "Yes. You are the better of them."

It had begun to shiver.

"Are you cold?" asked Polo.

It nodded, affecting the look of a lost child.

"Then you need some exercise," he said, "You'd better go back into the house and start tidying up."

The fury looked bewildered, even disappointed, by this instruction.

"Nothing more?" it asked incredulously. "No miracles? No Helen of Troy? No flying?"

The thought of flying on a snow-spattered afternoon like this left Polo cold. He was essentially a man of simple tastes: all he asked for in life was the love of his children, a pleasant home, and a good trading price for gherkins.

"No flying," he said.

As the Yattering slouched down the path towards the door it seemed to alight upon a new piece of mischief. It turned back to Polo, obsequious, but unmistakably smug.

"Could I just say something?" it said.

"Speak."

"It's only fair that I inform you that it's considered ungodly to have any contact with the likes of me.

Barker

Heretical even."

"Is that so?"

"Oh yes," said the Yattering, warming to its prophecy. "People have been burned for less."

"Not in this day and age," Polo replied.

"But the Seraphim will see," it said. "And that means you'll never go to that place."

"What place?"

The Yattering fumbled for the special word it had heard Beelzebub use.

"Heaven," it said triumphant. An ugly grin had come on to its face; this was the cleverest maneuver it had ever attempted; it was juggling theology here.

Jack nodded slowly, nibbling at his bottom lip.

The creature was probably telling the truth: association with it or its like would not be looked upon benignly by the Host of Saints and Angels. He probably was forbidden access to the plains of paradise.

"Well," he said, "You know what I have to say about that, don't you?"

The Yattering stared at him frowning. No, it didn't know. Then the grin of satisfaction it had been wearing died, as it saw just what Polo was driving at.

"What do I say?" Polo asked it.

Defeated, the Yattering murmured the phrase.

"Che sera, sera."

Polo smiled. "There's a chance for you yet," he said, and led the way over the threshold, closing the door with something very like serenity on his face.

Clive Barker, author of Books Of Blood I-VI, The Damnation Game, Weaveworld, and The Great And Secret Show. For more on Clive, see Shadowlands, this issue



Photo: Murray Close



IN THE DARK

Movie
Reviews

Wither thou Gorest

By
Bill Warren

...Or perhaps that should be "wither, thou gorefest." Because sure-fire blood and guts thrillers are clotting fast. In 1989, entries in of the Standard Slasher Series dribbled returns into the box office, unlike the robust profits of the previous entries in each just a year before.

New Line was surprised by the anemic profits from *A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Dream Child*, the fifth entry in the series. *Nightmare 4* had grossed over forty million bucks, but the new one only did around twenty. Now, on the limited investment made in the film in the first place, that's not bad, but the distributors were puzzled.

Hey, they did everything right, right? Director Stephen Hopkins, from England by way of Jamaica and Australia, had made a name for himself in glitzy rock videos, and would of course bring a enazzy visual style to the film. He did, too — but failed to make the scrambled, awkwardly-structured script, ultimately credited to Leslie Bohem, compelling or even interesting. The movie was approximately as exciting as watching an equal length of blank film.

It's not that it's bad — it's that it's not anything. The movie is bland, uninvolved and thinly plotted, and there's not nearly enough of Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) himself. The movie seems longer than it is because of the slight plot, and because director Stephen Hopkins lurches from flamboyant direction to the merely routine. Heroine Lisa Wilcox is good, but she's really the only one who is, except for Englund, who has his chuckling demon down pat.

Hopkins shoots everything low density, low contrast, as if it's all ready to be transferred to videotape. This flattens the visual, and the dream sequences look like the film's "reality" scenes. Now, part of that is built into the concept: the protagonists are not

always *sup-posed* to know when they're awake and when they're ensnared in a Freddy-directed dream. But here, Hopkins doesn't seem to have intended the sameness – it just comes out that way.

Underlying all this is a major question. In the first few *Nightmare* films, Freddy was out for revenge on the children of the people who killed him, but by now, that's all in the past. There's no clear motivation for ghostly Freddy to slice up people with those razor claws any more. He's doomed to repeat things forever, like a nightmare. Freddy will again rise from wherever he's gone, confront another young woman in her dreams, kill off a few of her friends, and then be destroyed again. The films have become as rigidly structured as a *haiku*; if New Line isn't going to kill this particular golden goose, they have got to change the direction of these bad dreams.

Of course, that's not necessarily an answer. Certainly *Friday the 13th: Jason Takes Manhattan* went in a new direction, but as with the new *Nightmare* movie, it just didn't do very well. Not for want of trying, though. Movies like this get reviewed by rote by most critics. They don't expect anything from a slasher movie, especially the latest in a series, and so they usually end up reviewing the movie they expected to see, rather than the one that's really up there on the screen.

That definitely happened here. Virtually every critic said *Friday VII* was just as dumb as the previous entries in this appallingly long series – but it's not. Early in the movie someone says, "Come on, I'm serious." But the film isn't; it isn't quite tongue-in-cheek, but is shrewdly self-aware, written and directed by Rob Hedden, who shows a lot of promise. Of course, it's still a slasher movie, with the usual sequential murders by the hockey-masked walking corpse Jason Voorhees, but Hedden's tongue-almost-in-cheek approach, plus his insistence upon having characters who are characters, in working with actual themes, and his very imaginative use of sound effects lift this one way above the rest in the series, even above the clever *Part VI*, the only other entry in the series really worth talking about as a movie.

To begin with, there's more plot in the first fifteen minutes than in any of the previous sequels. Until now,

except for the one odd entry *without* Jason, the plots have just featured Jason killing teenagers one by one until the survivor manages to (however temporarily) defeat Jason. Here, after Jason is revived and drifts down to the sea in a pleasure boat, we meet the heroine, a would-be young horror writer, Rennie (Jensen Daggett), who is presented by her teacher with a pen used by Stephen King. Rennie is terrified of water, and only her stern, unsympathetic uncle Charles McCulloch (Peter Mark Richman) knows why. It's connected with Jason's own past.

Hedden amusingly, but not obviously, has the first three deaths connected to sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll; furthermore, virtually all of the killings are linked to water in one form or another. Water is used as a symbol of death – its cleansing ability is, wittily, given to toxic waste instead. Jason was created by drowning in the clean waters of a mountain lake, and can only be destroyed by something more noxious than he is. He traps the final two survivors in a tunnel under the Manhattan streets, but a flood of toxic waste washes over him. He vomits clear water, then dissolves in the flood of foulness, leaving only the naked body of the boy Jason. This is startlingly imaginative, even haunting; those who are condemned to write the sequel to *Part VIII* are not going to find it easy to bring Jason back this time.

Jason (Kane Hodder) is still a motiveless killer – he's now a literal walking corpse (thanks to *Part VI*), so stopping him is even harder – and that's the major weakness of the movie. Hedden also uncomfortably emphasizes the terror of several of the characters as they wait, helplessly, to be butchered by Jason; this is a serious miscalculation, making the film more grim than necessary, even for a slasher movie. The movie also stays on the ship far too long; we become impatient for Jason and the survivors to get to Manhattan and get on with it. It is less gory (by far) than the previous entries, but it is still a stalk-and-kill story, relentless and repetitious. But Rob Hedden has added some filigree, some intelligence and creativity, to the *Friday* the 13th skeleton. It may still be just a walking corpse, but it capers a bit as it slouches toward the climax.

Halloween 5, which I have not seen, has been described as the worst

in the series by some, by others as the best since *II* – not much of a recommendation. In any event, good or bad, it's just another adventure of Michael Myers, the Shape, who kills his relatives by rote, but who cannot be killed himself. Most have said that the film is just a big setup for *Halloween 6*.

But there may not be a *Halloween 6* – or a *Friday* the 13th *IX*, either, simply because there's little reason to throw good blood money after bad. The audience for slasher movies has fallen away, and many claim this is because the once vividly-realistic makeup effects that seemed to be the wellspring of the popularity of these movies have been essentially outlawed.

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), the eleven-member rating board that assigns G, PG, PG-13, R or X to movies submitted to it, have begun to be very heavy-handed about granting graphic-gore splatterfests even an R. They seem especially alert to "infractions" committed by the series horror movies; *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3*, though not especially graphic, was sent back for recutting so often that its November '89 release date had to be postponed until January of 1990.

The MPAA piously claims that having a film rated is entirely a voluntary procedure on the part of the distributor, but the fact is that it's hard to advertise an unrated film. Many newspapers refuse to advertise films rated X, and because most unrated movies are hard-core pornography, a lack of a rating is tantamount to an X rating, in terms of advertising. So even if your unrated film is as innocuous as *E.T.*, it will be treated as though it were loaded with suck-and-fuck scenes – you won't be able to advertise it. No advertising, no audience, no grosses. This is exactly what happened to *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* – it went out unrated, and unseen.

CARA is, supposedly, not a censorship organization, but that is in effect what it is, even though the group does not specify shots to be removed. Reagan may be out of the White House, but the conservatism of his regime is still hanging on at the MPAA and with CARA. Recently, the beloved bible of gorefans, the lively and sassy *Fangoria* magazine, ran a two-part article by

Jami Bernard on the MPAA, trying to uncover the reasons for CARA's heavy hand in rating the oozy movies. Bernard points out that *Rambo III* got an R rating, but contained several scenes of gory violence — impaled by a bolt, Rambo shoves it right through his body — but violent horror films, no more graphic, are given Xs until they're cut into mildness.

And even when the cuts are performed as suggested, the result can backfire. *RoboCop's* director Paul Verhoeven shot the moon with some of his astoundingly realistic scenes of violence, but the intent was to go over the top, to be so violent that no one could take it seriously. Those who have seen the unrated *RoboCop* are virtually unanimous in their claims that the MPAA-mandated cuts made the rated film *stronger* in terms of violence than the unrated version.

The point is, as Bernard says, that the MPAA bases their ratings on the *feeling* the movie generates, not specific scenes of violence. But this is illogical, of course. In a made-for-the-bucks bucket of guts like any of the *Friday the 13th* movies, the extreme gore seems less offensive in context than Stallone's ultra-macho bullhorns in *Rambo III*, because the Stallone film does not really have violence as its subject. In a boxing match, a bone-shattering blow has less impact — on viewers, anyway — than a less powerful blow would have in an Ingmar Bergman drama.

The MPAA's accusation that some films are "too tense in general" is preposterous when the *intent* is to be tense. Bernard quotes Jack Valenti, who invented the MPAA and has headed it ever since (more than 21 years): all 11 members of CARA are parents. "And we want them to put themselves in the shoes of the average parent, so that when they view a picture, they'll say 'Do I think the majority of parents would find the rating of this picture reasonable and sensible?'" As if all movies are made for parents, or at least are to be approved by them. Childless audiences are left out, gazing at the family fun within. It's true that parents *should* be provided with information allowing them to decide whether their kids should see this or that movie — but are R-rated movies for kids at all?

Valenti refuses to start a new rating indicating a film is for adults

only, because there are enough ratings now. "I think it would creak and groan under the burden," Valenti claims. But Bernard points out that "all that creaking and groaning didn't stop Valenti from creating the PG-13 category after Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*" threatened to receive an R-rating, walling it off from kids. Of course, because the MPAA charges for rating films on a scale related to the cost of the movie, big studio pay for most of the ratings, so the MPAA has been known to kneecap pictures in the groin while embracing big ones.

Some filmmakers deliberately include scenes they know will be offensive to the MPAA, hoping that the scene they *really* want to include will get by unnoticed, but this seldom works out the right way. Sometimes the scene that the MPAA hints should be cut is the must-include shot, while they overlook the throwaway.

The MPAA has gotten harder on horror films over the years, partly no doubt because of the increasing general tone of conservatism in the country: in a time when hysterics see Satanism in Dungeons & Dragons, an overreaction to decapitations and eviscerations should have been expected. The real problem isn't that the MPAA is hard on exploitative graphic horror films, but that this makes the use of graphic gore by more responsible filmmakers more and more difficult. It's just another tool of the dramatist's trade, and should not be taken away.

Of course, those who cite *Titus Andronicus* as the forerunner to *Blood of Ghouls* Horror are sophists of the first water. But then again, if you can't take the heat, stay out of the abattoir — it's usually pretty easy to spot a likely-to-be-gruesome movie. You don't like them, fine — stay away.

On the other hand, it is probably too easy to blame the MPAA. When videocassettes first caught on with the public, the hunger for *anything* on tape was voracious, and movies that would never have been made in the first place flooded the video stores. After a while, satiation set in; those who would have sat still for drek like *Hobgoblins* became far more selective, and demanded the same movies — not just the same *kind* of movies — that were playing down the street at the tin-walled multi-screen mall theater.

And among those that fell by the wayside were graphic gore movies. Italian zombies gather dust on video store shelves alongside the umptyumptump variation on *Halloween*. Sure, some kids still rent them for gross-out parties, but they aren't the hot item they once were. After all, there are just so many ways you can slash a throat, gut a belly or explode a head, and in the last ten years or so, awesomely inventive special effects experts have more than risen to the task.

But now the task seems to be changing. Partly because the *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies, because of their centering on dreams, visual and, more importantly, *story* imagination have begun to blossom in the medium-budget horror thrillers. *Re-Animator*, of a few years ago, has spawned *Bride of the Re-Animator*, in which that living, disembodied head gains bat wings and flutters about the lab. In *Society*, the focus is on sex and a bizarre, parallel species that reproduces by melting into big, writhing puddles of heads and arms. In *Meet the Applegates*, Debrah Coleman plays the dad of a family of gigantic Amazon insects who disguise themselves as people and move into suburbia. In *The Borrower*, a headless alien gets ahead in the world — several of them, in fact, sequentially swiping new heads from its victims. Not all of these movies are likely to be good, but this sure is a heck of a long way from a guy in a hockey mask chopping up teenagers.

Even in films obviously intended to ape at least some of the effects of the various horror series imagination has peeped through. *I, Madman*, which wended its way slowly across the country all during 1989, was a case in point. The central figure seems pretty clearly intended as a hook to hang a new series on, but it didn't work. Audiences are quick to smell this kind of thing and resent it; after all, none of the three continuing hero/villains was designed as the focus of a series.

Despite this, *I, Madman* is a clever, imaginative little shocker, with an excellent, unusual performance from Jenny Wright as Virginia, the heroine, a novel, if murky, storyline and some good makeup and animation effects. The script, by David Chasdin, is probably too strange—several elements are unexplained—but unlike almost all other

horror movies on this budget level today, it respects the intelligence of the audience.

Possibly because of the looming threat of the MPAA and the X rating, it's not especially gruesome. Tibor Takacs, who also directed *The Gate*, is actually trying to scare people the old-fashioned way, through suspense and tension, and often succeeds. He's helped by stylish photography by Bryan England, good, even witty, music by Michael Hoenig, and understated, funny production design by Ron Wilson and Matthew Jacobs.

The clearest thing about the film is that it does depict something almost all of us have done, but which I have never seen in a movie before. Our heroine is Virginia, an aspiring actress who works in a book store; she has a secret vice: horror novels. In fact, the movie opens showing a scene from a novel she's reading, and Jenny Wright plays the central female character in the scenes-within-the-scenes as well. Scary books, as readers of *Iniquities* surely must know, are notoriously hard to put down—and Virginia can't do it either. Repeatedly, almost against her will, she picks up the book and reads, wide-eyed with fear.

So *I, Madman* is one of the very few horror movies ever actually to be about the process of being scared, and how we secretly love to be frightened. Even when we are actually frightened by a book or movie, we turn back to it again. *I, Madman* is not philosophical; it doesn't endeavor to suggest why we keep going back to terror, but it is cheeky and insightful in showing someone doing this.

Takacs is very clear about what's going on: as Virginia reads, she brings back to life more and more often the insane Malcolm Brand (Randall William Cook, who did his own makeup) who wrote the two books she reads, and who sliced off his nose, lips and ears when they offended the actress he loved. Trying to create a face she'll like, he butchered people and replaced his ears, nose, lips and hair with features sliced off their heads. Now he's doing it again, apparently to satisfy Virginia.

But Takacs and Chaskin can't tell us how any of this is being accomplished. There are contradictory hints that Brand never died back in the 1950s, when his chewed corpse was found

outside the insane asylum he fled, and that he has brought himself back to life through alchemy, of all things.

While Takacs could learn some things about pacing, he knows how to allow actors to look like they live in their sets. Wright, who's notably good (she was the vampire girl in *Near Dark*), really seems at home in the funky, funny bookstore set as well as her dingy apartment. (There's a hint that it is the same apartment that Brand's object of desire lived in; maybe that's the connection.) He also manages the shift from the 1950s to the 1980s smoothly and unobtrusively; he treats the 50s as real, without layering on details. He does use the terrific old song "Chanson D'Amour", and allows composer Hoenig to score the 1950s scenes like 1950s movies. (At one point, the score sounds quite like that for *The Mole People*, of all things.)

The best contribution other than that of Takacs and clever writer Chaskin is by Randall William Cook, who's all over the place. Not only did he design and apply the amusingly gruesome patchwork face for the lunatic (Brand is a connoisseur—he doesn't limit himself to male features), he did the stop-motion animation of the Jackal Boy monster that also pops into reality from a Brand book. Interestingly, Cook underplays the role of Brand, avoiding chewing the scenery in favor of sullen menace. Cook has been a good stop-motion animation technician for years; I had no idea he could act as well as this, or do such imaginative, if disquieting, makeup.

The film has a lot of unusual, surprising touches. There's a nod to *Rear Window* in having a piano player in a building near Virginia's, constantly providing her own private background music. At the climax, in the bookstore, Virginia finds herself scrambling over masses of books on a stairs, wittily including a bunch of *National Geographic*—a bibliophile's nightmare. And what finally happens to Brand and the Jackal Boy at the finale is even poetic. Virginia conjures up the Jackal Boy, a failed genetic experiment, and it battles with Brand, but is apparently defeated. Just as Brand is about to kill the heroine and her cop boyfriend, the Jackal Boy's living head and trunk attack Brand; they explode backward out a window, turning into a tornado of fluttering pages, soon blown away over the city.

I, Madman may be derivative, market-guided horror, with too few explanations, but it's also smart, funny and vivid, with an excellent performance by Jenny Wright, and good ones from everyone else. It will develop a reputation, and well it should.

Whether through being diluted by the MPAA, or worn out through repetition, graphic gore that is only graphic gore is definitely on the way out. With films like *I, Madman* and some of those others, a new direction is being shown. But no matter how inventive and imaginative these movies get, this genre is driven by the audience—and if they don't buy it, horror movies will become but ghosts of their former selves.



Bill Warren



Apostate In Denim

By
Roberta Lannes

Illustrations By
Rick Leider

"God sends meat and the devil sends cooks."
Thomas Deloney (1543-1600)

The early afternoon sun beat down on Barry Boag's back as he stood cat-like still, his eye to the sliver of space between the wall boards of Mr. Hardesty's shack. Sweat trickled through his dark oily hair and down into the neck of his t-shirt. He didn't dare make a sound and give away his presence. He worried his heartbeat might distract Mr. Hardesty, and he knew what that could mean.

The body that lie belted down to Mr. Hardesty's gurney twitched and strained to be free. Barry couldn't see the face on the body, since Mr. Hardesty was standing in the way, but Barry guessed it was the missing kid he'd heard about on the radio. Barry didn't know the kid and probably wouldn't be able to recognize him anyhow, now that Mr. Hardesty had been attending to him all this time.

Mr. Hardesty turned toward his tool cart and examined a frightening looking pair of twisted surgical tongs. Its polished chrome surface gleamed in the intense light of the operating room-type lamp overhead. Barry figured the bright lamp was why Mr. Hardesty never took to working on his bodies at night. With all the holes and cracks in the shack's old walls, the light would surely cut sharp white beams into the

darkness, alerting an unsuspecting couple passing through searching for a place to park, or an off-road driver. Mr. Hardesty was too discreet to let anyone know what he did. For him, the perfect time of day was from one in the afternoon until three, when he closed his hobby ehop.

Barry wanted to shift his weight off of his right leg and he urgently needed to take a piss. He moved ever so slowly to pinch his penis in the way he had as a little boy when his mother would ignore his pleas to find a bathroom. His fingers slid over dirty denim as he aquinted to see what Mr. Hardesty was about to do.

In a slick, smooth, slow-motion movement, Mr. Hardesty took the hemostat and worked it into the socket of the boy's eye, fixing the eyeball in its grasp. As Mr. Hardesty squeezed the handles together, he tightened his grip over the eyeball. Mr. Hardesty's free hand went over the boy's nose and mouth as he swiveled and yanked back with all his strength. The pale orb came out with a trail of nerves, veins, and ragged bits of flesh. Mr. Hardesty held it over a white porcelain pan and released it. The sound reminded Barry of a bird hitting a pane of glass.

The body arched as Mr. Hardesty poured peroxide into the eye socket, then stiffened, still. A silence fell as Mr. Hardesty stared down and sighed at his prey. Blood ran through pink froth from the kid's eye.

Shit, this is the best stuff yet, Barry thought. He felt the intoxicating rush he always got when watching Mr. Hardesty. Suddenly, a bee began mercilessly buzzing near his ear. Barry fought the desire to swat at it, to smash it dead. To move would call dangerous attention to his presence. He stood his ground, gritting his teeth. The bee landed inside his ear, fussing and buzzing, then stung him. Barry winced then pissed his pants. He could smell the bitter odor and prayed Mr. Hardesty couldn't do the same.

Barry squeezed his eyes shut until he could hear Mr. Hardesty put away his tools, shut off the light, and lock the shack door behind him. Barry shifted slightly, but didn't move until he heard Mr. Hardesty's Dodge van start up. Then he scratched furiously at his ear and cursed under his breath over his wet jeans.

The van went up a dirt cloud as it sped off down the hillside. Barry walked into the swirling red clay dust as he lumbered over to where he had his truck hidden up the hill. The dust left a patch of the rust-colored particles where it stuck to the wet spot on his jeans. He glanced down at the patch and elapsed his hand over his eyes.

"Fuck. Now I gotta go to work like this. Great."

He removed his jeans and underwear when he arrived at his beat up Datsun pick-up. He left them on the truck bed to dry in the sun. As he stood naked from the waist down, the warmth on his bare skin gave him a hard on. He crawled into the cab and sat bare-assed on the ripped upholstery recalling Mr. Hardesty's "dirty deeds", as he'd named them. He absently stroked himself. Remembering each "deed", imagining it was he—himself—making the incisions, drawing long lines in flesh with a scalpel, flaying the skin, experimenting with various substances on raw nerve fibers, brought back the exhilarating rush. Mindless of his hand furiously working him closer to orgasm, he visualized breaking small bones with his ballping hammer, then twisting the fingers or toes into unnatural angles, imagined hearing muffled screams echoing inside a mouth sewn shut. As he climaxed, he shrieked, sweat dripping down his forehead into his eyes.

He lie exhausted across the seat. Life was great since he'd found Mr. Hardesty's hideaway. Now he had a place he felt he belonged; where he could have all his bizarre thoughts and weird feelings, his fantasies and desires, and feel he was all right. He could never let Mr. Hardesty know he came to watch, that he admired and revered the old guy for his surgical artistry. Mr. Hardesty could turn on him, and Barry didn't want to end up looking like a bad autopsy. No.

He would just have to keep the secret. That way he would continue to have what he wanted most in the world—a safe place.

He had to get to work. Barry pulled on his dry underwear and jeans and got into his truck. For a moment he took in the sweet scents of sage and mesquite, and felt the breeze wafting through the truck's open windows, then smelled the stink of his jeans. The humiliation was terrible.

As he drove by the shack, Barry thought of the poor, lonely, frightened boy who most certainly lay inside dead. The boy's mother would still be worried, not knowing her little one was serving a strange purpose up in the hills above the valley. She would be weeping, heartbroken. Barry felt a pang of envy, wishing his mother could care for him a fraction as much as the little boy's mother surely cared for hereon. He choked down a tear, let fly a "fuck this shit", and raced down the hill to work.

The body arched as Mr. Hardesty poured peroxide into the eye socket, then...

The Chuckwagon BBQ was along the interstate, surrounded by a forest of dogwood and cherry trees. The restaurant was popular with town kids as a cheap place to take a date and it was just down the road from the best parking spot in the whole county. Barry was one of the cooks.

He hated the place except for the fact that the woman he wanted most in the entire world worked there as a part-time cashier. Amy Sue Timmons.

Amy Sue was a double-leg amputee who's aunt owned the Chuckwagon BBQ. Barry once tactfully asked her aunt how Amy Sue lost her legs. She said that Amy Sue had been accidentally run over by a tandem disc harrow on her daddy's farm fifteen years ago. Amy Sue was quite pretty, but was almost always depressed or in a sullen mood. Barry loved trying to cheer her up with jokes and wildly accurate imitations of the customers. She had grown fond of his visits during his breaks and he knew it was a just matter of time before he could ask her for a date. After all, he figured, he did make her laugh, which was more than anybody else in her life did for her.

His heart raced as he pulled up behind the Chuckwagon and hurried into the kitchen, swatting the remaining red dust from his jeans. Don Nguyen was just putting two burgers down on the grill when Barry came in. He turned slowly away from the stove.

"Shit, Barry, you smell like skunk piss." Don stepped away.

"Yeah? Well you look like a real smart gook to me, so try'n figure what saying a stupid-ass thing like

that could get you from a mentally unbalanced guy like me." Barry lurched forward, grabbed Nguyen's Adam's apple and squeezed. The man twisted away coughing.

"Hell, man, I was just tryin' to...forget it." Nguyen ripped off his apron and stormed out the back door.

Barry laughed. "Gook!"

"Hey, Boag, get over here." Amy Sue's aunt Martha waved him over to the freezer. "I need help with these steaks."

"Sure." Barry smiled his very best people-pleasing smile.

"Boag, you smell like piss. You fall into something?" She handed him the boxes.

"No Ma'am. I think it's the window cleaner I spilled." He grinned weakly, sure she saw through his lie.

"Well, I ain't gonna work near you smelling like that. Go into my office and put on the overalls I got hanging from the hat rack."

Barry set the steaks by the grill and sulked down the hall to her office. He tossed his dirty stuff into the laundry basket and got into the overalls, three sizes too large, and eight inches too short. His six foot, one-hundred and thirty pound body looked like a scarecrow; all long wooden arms and legs with grandpa's old clothes hung over them. He shrugged, wondering if Amy Sue would think he looked funny. He hoped so.

Half an hour later, the restaurant was so busy, Barry didn't have time to think. He liked it bustling, with the endless stream of orders, the hustle to fill them, the harried faces of the waitresses bobbing in and out of view over the base of the steel-rimmed window to the kitchen.

Once in a while, glancing out into the crowd, he found people he'd graduated from high school with the year before. He dreaded them seeing him, so he kept his head down as he worked.

Barry hadn't been well-liked. In fact, he had been the local pariah, the brunt of everyone's jokes. Besides having been teased for his acne, his Mondrian face, unmanageable hair, beanpole physique, lack of athletic ability, and absence of academic skills, Barry was infamous for his pathetic persistence with females. He'd slowly learned, through one heartbreak after another, he might never be like other guys. He never had dates, partners to dance with, girlfriends to hold hands with or hug. He longed to put his nose to a girl's hair and smell the sweet scent of shampoo lingering, caress her cheek and feel softness he could only imagine. He was a true romantic. But experience taught him the painful truth. He didn't belong, and he probably wasn't going to. So, when it was hectic in the

kitchen at work, he didn't have the time to notice if the others saw him. Being busy was bliss.

When the rush eased off after nine, Barry could watch Amy Sue in her wheelchair, behind the register and glass display case. Sometimes he got a high from checking out the expression on the face of a customer who peered over the glass case, seeing that Amy Sue had no legs. It was something about their look of abject horror that raised the floodgates on Barry's adrenaline level. The best times came when some truly bent guy would come on to her and tell her he'd like to fuck her. She had a great line that slaughtered the assholes. God, he loved it when she told them she'd have to first make sure that they had no less than ten sturdy inches or she fell right off. The guys always got angry, then stormed out the front door as quickly as they could.

He hoped she knew that he liked her for who she was, not what she could be like in bed, though admittedly he had thought about it some. What he really wanted was for the two of them to get married, have

Barry hadn't been well-liked. In fact, he had been the local pariah...

children, create a life together; all the things normal people did. Together they could cheat the harsh world and their painful limitations.

He took his break, washed up, then went out front to talk to her.

"Lo, Amy Sue. You look pretty tonight. That a new blouse?"

"You say that every night, Barry. It's not a blouse, it's a top, and it's not new. Stop trying to flatter me." She tried to sound mean, but Barry knew his compliments made her feel good. "What're you dressed for, Halloween?"

"Hell, no. I got my jeans messed up. These're Martha's. Kinda sporty, huh?" He pretended to be a runway model, the drama fueled by Amy Sue's giggles. "So what're you doing these days?" He leaned against the counter.

She toyed with a paper cylinder full of quarters as she regained her composure. "Same old thing, Barry. Not much. I work, I go home, I knit, I watch TV. What about you?" She shrugged in her usual forlorn way.

He wanted to tell her about Mr. Hardesty, but he knew no matter how open-minded she was, it would scare the shit out of her. Besides, Barry knew the importance of secrecy. If she knew and didn't approve, it would crush him.

"Me? Same, only I don't knit. Maybe you and me could go for a ride sometime." Whoa. It was out. He hadn't even planned it. He felt his mouth go dry and his pulse race.

She blinked rapidly, then laughed. "Is this

your idea of a joke, Barry Boag?"

He shook his head, his anxiety level approaching full panic. He opened his mouth and choked out a line of nervous chatter delivered with machine gun speed: "I been thinking on it for the last six months. I really like talking to you. I make you laugh, and that makes me feel really good. I think you're really pretty, too. It'd be neat to drive up to the lake, watch the ducks. You know. Shit like that." He gulped air.

"You want to go to the lake with me?" She didn't believe him. That shocked him.

"Sure. I don't have any real friends. I get lonely some, and I want to do stuff other people do. You know, talk and hang out." He knew it sounded lame, but it was all he had.

"Can't think about it?" Her face went blank. He wondered if she was near going into a coma.

"No problem. I gotta go back to work. Martha is staring at us. Let me know later."

She nodded.

By closing time, Barry had burned four steaks, completely screwed up three, and dropped ribs he was slicing onto the floor. He tried to hurry through his clean up and get out front before Amy Sue's father picked her up. But, when he looked up after scraping the grill, she was being rolled out to the car.

He stood in the parking lot in tears. Why had he even bothered to ask her out? She hadn't even cared enough to say anything to him one way or the other. She probably wanted to let him down easy. Why did he think Amy Sue could have been different than all the rest, anyhow? Hell, no one would ever go out with Barry Boag. If he couldn't get a cripple, then who could he get?

Martha saw him standing by his truck and shouted over to him. "Hey, Boag, go home."

He shrunk in the darkness against the battered blue of the cab. He hoped she hadn't seen the wetness on his cheeks. He just wanted to curl up and die. He wiped his face and turned to wave, but Martha was already in her car and backing up.

He waited until she left, then drove himself up to "Heaven", the parking spot up the road from the Chuckwagon, behind the copse of dogwood trees. He cruised it once in a while, hoping to catch a couple in the dirt with his headlights, rubbing flesh on flesh, exchanging bodily fluids. That frozen moment would stay in his mind for days and was good for some fist action under the blankets at night. But tonight it seemed a hollow gesture. He drove through once and went home.

As he lie in bed, he fought the tears. He tried

not to think of Amy Sue, but her face just kept creeping in behind his eyelids. She might as well have laughed at him and called him a pencil-necked jerk, like everyone else had.

He remembered his father laughing at him like that all the time, wondering aloud if Barry was really someone else's kid, because Barry surely wasn't a Boag. His father speculated Barry was an alien spawn, or stolen from an institution for criminally over-sexed retards. That hurt worse than the occasional beatings. Hearing the same stuff day after day, Barry eventually stopped feeling anything. Barry was eleven when his father quickly and mysteriously got sick and died. He couldn't even cry. He was just so relieved the laughing had stopped.

Then came his step-father, Earl, who never even smiled at him. The man's grim, humorless stoicism was fine with Barry, except the guy thought Barry was the slave part of this package deal with Barry's mother. His already callous and uncaring mother took to ignoring Barry completely in favor of Earl.

Barry put his face in his pillow and let the tears come. He thought of his parents, his classmates who had made so much fun of him. He recalled the chides about his inappropriate dress and lack of social skills, his crushes on teachers who, in turn, belittled and abused him. And now Amy Sue had rejected him, too. He wept fierce angry tears. Why would no one love him?

The loud rapping on his bedroom door startled him. He took in a ragged breath.

"What?" he yelled in the dark.

"It's your mother!" Silence. Maybe she'd heard him crying and she wanted to hold him, make him feel better. Maybe she knew he was hurting.

"Yeah?" He didn't dare hope.

"Cut out that blubbering. Earl's tryin' to sleep, ya hear me?"

Barry rolled away, biting at his pillow. Yeah, sure he heard her. His stomach burned and his tears stopped. He waited until he could hear her slippers slapping at the floor outside his door, then he punched at his mattress until his arm was tired.

Mr. Hardesty's store was packed the next morning. Kids were pestering their mothers to buy them model kits and women were restocking their doll making supplies. Barry bought some balsa wood to build a glider, like he had once built long ago with Mr.

He stood in the parking lot in tears. Why had he even bothered to ask her out?

Hardesty, his son Tim, and Mr. Boag.

Barry was only three when he first met Mr. Hardesty. Mr. Boag had been an avid glider enthusiast, and it was he who took Barry into the shop way back then. Though it was obvious his father detested Mr. Hardesty, and seemed to get a strange enjoyment out of picking on Barry and Mr. Hardesty, Mr. Boag encouraged the four of them to go to the park and fly their gliders together. It never felt right, even though Barry grew to love flying. Then Tim was killed by a drunk driver. Tim was only a couple years older, and Barry was suddenly aware of his own mortality. His father got eick and passed on a month later. Barry was lost. Mr. Hardesty was devastated. Soon, their losses brought them together.

At first Mr. Hardesty took Barry to the park on Sunday, just to reminisce. Then they began spending more time together, going on outings; biking and fishing, sometimes camping up in the mountains near Mr. Hardesty's shack. During those years, Barry hoped that Mr. Hardesty would marry his mother. He could tell Mr. Hardesty liked her a lot. But, she seemed to hate the man. One day she told Barry he could never see Mr. Hardesty again. She never explained, she just forbid it. That was five years ago, and Mr. Hardesty and Barry had since grown distant. Barry had been watching him for nearly ten months now, but it did little for Barry's aching desire to be close to someone.

"Well, Barry, good to see you. You look tired. Working late? Girls?" Mr. Hardesty laughed. He had a funny laugh, like the devil on helium. He was a tall, gangly built man, with a hawkish, incessantly flushed face and thinning auburn colored hair. His small green eyes seemed to twinkle with boyish mischief. Barry noticed his long fine fingers. The hands of a surgeon.

"Not girls, no sir. I wish. I work late at the Chuckwagon BBQ." Barry nodded, a stray hank of hair bobbing in front of his eyes. He ran his finger over the shrink wrap on a Mig fighter kit on the counter.

"What keeps you busy otherwise? You building a glider again?" Mr. Hardesty raised his eyebrows as he rang up the balsa wood and some cement on the register. There was something in his tone that made Barry shiver.

Barry swallowed hard, then looked up at the ceiling. "Hey, you took down my old bi-plane models. How come?"

Mr. Hardesty looked up. "Yup. Kids don't buy 'em like they used to. I got 'em in the back if you want 'em. I'd never throw 'em away."

Barry stared off, his eyes resting on a six year

old boy, one about the size of the kid on Mr. Hardesty's gurney. He thought of Mr. Hardesty's hand holding the scalpel, the flesh parting. He blinked. He was getting an erection.

"Naw, L..." Barry blushed as he took the bag from Mr. Hardesty. The man seemed to be staring at Barry's crotch.

"Well, show me what you build. I'll hang it up with the new things when you get tired of flying it."

"Yeah, sure." Barry held the bag over the front of his jeans and hurried out past the little boy.

He sat in the truck thinking about how awkward it was now with Mr. Hardesty. Then he thought about the boy. Barry's erection stubbornly remained. He shuddered to think that maybe he was turning into a queer for kids. Why were little boys suddenly doing this to him? Maybe it wasn't the boys at all, but the thought of cutting them up that gave him the tingle in his groin. Or maybe it was some demon inside him. Some sick, starved beast that controlled his thoughts, his desires, his cock. He did feel something growing

deep down. Something big. But what?

The notion was frightening, but only because Barry knew this discovery was only going to isolate him more. No one could know. Not that there was anyone who would be in the least bit inter-

ested, he thought bleakly. No one. Not even Mr. Hardesty.

Mr. Hardesty was doing important things in his shack--to Barry, something mystical, magical, and very dangerous. Mr. Hardesty was God-like to Barry--much too important to listen to or understand Barry Boag's conflicted descent into perversion. Mr. Hardesty's purposefulness and power over life and death made Barry's fears and worries seem trivial. Embarrassing. Barry wanted what Mr. Hardesty had. That sense of purpose. The power. He wanted it desperately. To experience these feelings might bring him all the things he'd missed all his life. Anything to keep the demons at bay. Or the dreaded possibility he was turning into a fag.

He drove up past the shack and parked the truck out of sight. It would be another half hour before Mr. Hardesty would close up his shop for "lunch". Barry walked down the hill to his spot behind the ramshackle building and planted himself against the back wall.

A breeze blew through the cracks in the shed and cooled him. He could vaguely smell the rot of flesh and excrement from inside. He wondered what Mr. Hardesty did with the bodies when he was through

Mr. Hardesty was
doing important things
in his shack--to Barry,
something mystical...

with them. Barry had never heard of any of the missing kids turning up. Every time Barry witnessed Mr. Hardesty working his medical experiments on a body, the form simply got worked to death and then disappeared. Always, within days, another body was there to replace the last. Barry cursed his plight of resigned silence and invisibility. If he didn't have to hide, he would know what really happened.

Barry listened to the air moaning through the boards, then he realized the sound was coming from inside. The boy was still alive.

Mr. Hardesty drove up at a quarter past one. He hurried in, flicked on the light, and checked on his patient. Barry heard Mr. Hardesty say what he always said to the kid at this point in his work.

"It's almost over. Daddy has one or two more operations left to perform, then the hurt will go away. I promise. You're making a huge contribution here, you know. I was in Viet Nam, and I saw such mutilation, such awful trauma. But, I saved a lot of lives. Yes, I did. But, they weren't happy boys. No. They wished they had died. They had to live with terrible deformities. I am doing this for them. All of them. Yes, I am."

Barry didn't understand the twisted logic, but he was in awe of Mr. Hardesty's skill. Barry remembered his father telling him about how Mr. Hardesty had been a medic and how he had tried and failed to save Tim when he was hit by the drunk. That Mr. Hardesty had felt he had lost his skills and his ability to heal, so he no longer deserved to live. When Barry's father got sick, Barry had asked Mr. Hardesty to save him, hoping that if Mr. Hardesty did that, he wouldn't feel like a failure anymore. But, Barry's father disappeared from his bed one day and never came back. Barry knew that what he was watching now was somehow connected with Mr. Hardesty's failures and how maybe he had found a way to fight back.

In the light, Barry noticed the stitches that ran neatly along the boy's abdomen, along his legs. The skin was black and blue and swollen. The boy lie naked, his tiny genitals wrapped in a barbed wire cocoon. The boy's face turned away, then toward Barry. The lips were sewn shut as usual, his nose was crusted with blood and one eye glared around in panic. The eye looked his way, and Barry feared the boy might see him.

Mr. Hardesty brought out the hammer and the razor blades. Barry felt his groin tighten. Ah, the rituals. It was reassuring to feel the excitement over the pain, the ache inside him.

Whap. Whap. BopBopBop. Twist. Thwat. Fingers turned and bent in unnatural angles. The boy writhed and moaned. Barry felt his jeans grow tight over his erection. He wanted to touch it. He fought the desire, once again afraid this boy was making him queer. He thought of Amy Sue, and his hand went slowly, steadily to his crotch.



Mr. Hardesty continued the bone breaking ceremony, finishing the arms, beginning the ribs. Barry was moments away from absolute ecstacy. Once finished with the hammer, Mr. Hardesty took a razor blade and flicked it across the jugular veins, into the carotid arteries. Blood spurt into the air, landing with soft splashes on the plastic sheeting.

Barry groaned as he climaxed. He hadn't expected to, knowing to make a sound might mean his death. Too late. Mr. Hardesty spun around, his apron covered with blood. His eyes searched the wall for the telltale slit and when he found it, Barry tore away and began to run.

"Barry, stop! Stop!"

Barry heard his name, but instinct kept him running. He got to his truck, shaking so hard he couldn't get the keys out of his pocket. Mr. Hardesty was shouting up the hill, his voice growing louder, closer. Barry could barely breathe, his heart thumped hard in his throat.

"Wait, Barry. Stop." Mr. Hardesty huffed and sighed as he neared the truck. "Don't be afraid. I've known..." He caught his breath. "I've known for months you've been there. Don't...panic." The man panted. Sweat gleamed across his balding pate in the sun.

Barry squinted at Mr. Hardesty. He'd known all along? Barry shook with anger now, as well as fear. Mr. Hardesty smiled his fatherly smile at Barry as he

ambled up to him.

"No." Barry held up his hand to stop Mr. Hardesty. He set his jaw and grit his teeth. Mr. Hardesty had let him stand there like a fool fearing for his life in stone silence all this time. For what? Why? Had part of the thrill for Mr. Hardesty been knowing poor Barry was outside pissing in his pants? Barry recoiled as Mr. Hardesty reached out to him.

"Don't touch me, you perverted motherfucker. How could you keep doin' that stuff knowin' I was there and not say somethin'?"

Mr. Hardesty hung his head. He pulled the bloody apron off and bunched it up in his gloved fists.

"I'm sorry Barry. I should have told you I knew, but you weren't forthright and up front with me, either. But I'm not mad at you. I'm glad you like watching what I do." He grinned sheepishly. "Besides, if I'm such a perverted guy, what're you looking for, huh?"

Barry frowned suspiciously. "Get off it." He snorted. "Oh, yeah, sure you like me watching you. Why? Getting your rocks off knowin' I'm hiding out here like a..." He spit at the ground, then looked away.

"It's a lonely business, Barry. No one would ever understand, let alone appreciate it enough to watch over and over again. No one until you. I had to let you tell me how you felt about it when the time was right for you. I couldn't rush you."

Barry's mind was a mass of congealed confusion.

"Whadyamean, rush me?"

"Into the business. I miss the days when we were like father and son, doing things together. I want those good old days again. This could be even better. You and me, taking care of all the wretchedly flawed people, keepin'em alive, but just barely. Fixing all of God's mistakes. Say...you could choose 'em. Pick out the one's that need to be fixed. Healed. I could teach you all the medical arts. Think of it..." Mr. Hardesty's eyes glazed over.

Barry couldn't believe his ears. Mr. Hardesty was asking him to be there, right in the action. His head swam with delicious images, the pain he'd inflict, the close up view of every nuance, clear and unobstructed. The very stuff that fired his passions in every way. It was like being offered the real centerfold girl he'd been jerking off at for months. He felt a moment's hesitation, remembering Mr. Hardesty's betrayal, then was overwhelmed with absolute delight. He tried to be cool.

Barry nodded. "Okay, Mr. Hardesty. That'd be great. It'd be our secret then, right?" Mr. Hardesty

agreed. "God. Thanks!" He smiled.

Mr. Hardesty grinned. "You won't be sorry, Barry. We'll make a good team." He held out his hand and Barry grimaced. Mr. Hardesty looked down at the bloody surgical glove and smirked. "Well, I have to get back to my shop, but I want you up here tomorrow...no... Sunday's church and the Lion's Club meeting. How about Monday at one?"

"Got it. Monday." Barry watched Mr. Hardesty walk down the hill. This was *fucking unbelievable*. Just like the old days, only better. This time his mom would never know.

Barry drove to work in a daze. Once there, he began numbly cooking, staring off into space. He had completely forgotten about Amy Sue until she arrived up front two hours later. He felt the familiar knot in his gut, swallowed hard, and tried to push her out of his mind. After all, he was soon going to be part of something bigger than anything Amy Sue could offer him.

Maybe.

After closing, Barry walked out back to his truck and found Amy Sue sitting in her wheelchair, alone. Her father was nowhere to be seen.

"Hi. I told my daddy you would be driving me

home. Do you mind?" She clutched her purse to her chest.

Barry suddenly felt dirty, stupid and paralyzed.

"I...uh. Well, I..."

"I thought you wanted to take a drive with me." She let her lower lip pout out just a bit.

"I do. I just didn't expect it so soon. I didn't wash my truck. It's full of garbage."

"You're just going to take me home, not to the prom."

He laughed. "Yeah, right. I guess. You want to ride up front with me?"

"Of course, silly. Just put my chair in the back and I'll sit by you."

Barry nearly fainted as he lifted her gently into the cab and put the seat-belt on her. He could barely pick the wheelchair up, but finally got it into the back. He felt awkward and foolish. He was sure she would think he was a horrible driver and it would turn her off. He stalled for time as they sat in the moonlight.

"I don't know where you live."

"Sure you do. We live down the road from Martha. You've been there, haven't you?"

"Nope." He noticed she was wearing a new top.

Barry couldn't believe his ears. Mr. Hardesty was asking him to be there...

Red, low cut. She had fairly large breasts and he could see her cleavage. He had trouble taking in a full breath.

"Okay, I'll navigate. Start the car." She folded her arms.

Barry stole his eyes from her. The truck made a grinding noise when he tried to start it after the engine had already turned over. He smiled sheepishly.

"I may get a car that's specially equipped for my handicap. But, my daddy is very protective. Who knows?" She shrugged. "I may pick you up for a date sometime."

Barry knew he was dreaming. This couldn't be happening. He pinched himself to make sure. Nope. Wide awake.

Somehow he got to her house. It was a huge sprawling ranch style place, with lots of western trim and wagon wheels, lit with colored lights. As he was getting out she grabbed hold of his jacket and pulled at him.

"Can't we sit here awhile and talk?"

Barry nodded. He was numb with fear.

"Would you kiss me?" She brushed her hair off

her shoulders and Barry could, once again, see her gorgeous breasts.

He wished he had brushed his teeth, something he rarely did even when he thought about it. He hadn't shaved and though he had little hair on his face, it was stubbly.

"I don't know. I want to respect you. Not like all those jerks who hassle you."

She frowned. "I want you to kiss me. Please."

She put her face near his.

He kept his eyes open and planted a quick one on her.

She growled. "Not like that. Like this."

Her mouth went over his and in a short while, she was sitting in his lap, her breasts in his hands, his tongue down her throat, and she was moaning like he was killing her. He kept kissing and fondling, but try as he might to feel the familiar twinge down below, he felt nothing. He figured it was because he knew her father could come out any moment and he wanted to keep his job...and his balls.

She squirmed over his crotch with precision and great agility, as if she knew what she was doing. Maybe she had done this before. This was getting him pissed off. She reached down and tried to open his fly.

"Hey, don't."

"That's a switch. Come on. My father is gone."

I want it."

Barry was stunned. He wanted love, closeness

and a future, not this mindless shit. He pushed her against the steering wheel.

"Ow! What are you doing?"

"I don't want to fuck you. I want to marry you. Don't you know I love you?"

She began to laugh. "What? Haaaaa. That's a good one. I'll never get married. No way. I just wanna have fun."

Her laughter made him even angrier. "Don't you want kids and a house and stuff like that?"

"Jesus, Barry, I may not have legs but I have better sense than to be bored to death. I want to play."

Barry lurched out of the truck. Amy Sue tipped over on her side in the cab, cursing.

Barry glared at her, incredulous. "I thought you were like me. I want a normal life."

"You're crazy, Barry. You're not normal and you'll never have a normal life. Me neither. So get off that traditional values crap. You're a reject like me."

He snapped. He couldn't remember ever feeling more rejected, angry and disappointed, so horribly misunderstood. He threw her wheelchair onto the walkway.

"You want to get laid? Okay. You'll have fun now."

He pulled her out of the truck, fell with her onto the grassy knoll beside the walkway, and began ripping her clothes off. The more she seemed to like it, the less aroused he felt. When he realized

he wasn't going to get it up for her, he thought of Mr. Hardesty's fine handiwork and suddenly he was rock hard.

He growled at her when he came. Spittle dripped on her face as he caught his breath and his eyes came rolling down from inside his head. When he looked down and saw her beatific smile of satisfaction, he elunk off her and away.

Furious, he left her by her wheelchair at the bottom of the ramp to her front door and sped off. It seemed only fair to dump her there. All the way home he cried. Here it was, his first time, with someone he had imagined he could spend his whole life with, and she hadn't cared who he was, what he needed or felt. She hadn't cared about anything but getting laid. It felt terrible. And it was probably the only chance he was ever going to have with a girl.

He lie awake in the night wondering why he hadn't been able to tell that Amy Sue was a nymphomaniac. How he had dreamed of making love to someone special. But now, all he could remember about it was how used he felt and what she had said about how he was never going to have a normal life. He was a

Barry was stunned.
He wanted love, closeness and a future. Not this mindless shit.

reject. He couldn't stop thinking about it. To kill that rumination, he began looking forward to Monday, with all its gruesome possibilities. Something he could count on. The only thing. He closed his eyes to dream of twisted flesh.

Sunday was excruciatingly long. In his boredom, Barry pulled out his ancient dog-eared snuff film catalogue and the three porno magazines he still had hidden under his mattress from when he was thirteen years old. His one and only friend, Will Dinkens, had stolen them from his old man. The two boys spent many a night camped out in Will's backyard, ogling and gaping over the smut with a flashlight. Barry fought the memory of Will. Another loss in his life.

Barry flipped through the pages and tried to forget. Then he came upon the "gripper". It was a tool Will had named. In the catalogue, in black and white, was the picture of a beautiful woman, hung from a wooden frame with metal "hands" of razor sharp steel, grasping and piercing the flesh of her breasts. His favorite.

It made him think of Monday, a new kid, learning the trade from Mr. Hardesty. Absolute ecstasy. He was ready. He jerked off a good three times before his mother began banging on his door accusing him of doing what he was doing and threatening him with global exposure if he didn't come out and wash Earl's Buick. A half hour later she was back for him to mow the lawn.

Barry had stopped imagining his mother being tortured to death long ago. It had gotten him too aroused. No. His fantasies of his mother's death were not violent, just sudden.

He felt sad. If his mother had loved him, he wouldn't have had to feel this way. She had been so fucking disappointed in him. He wished he'd been born a nice-looking boy, a good and smart boy. Maybe then she would have loved him right. But, it was too late now. He'd grown up knowing only one person could care about him. Mr. Hardesty. And his mother wasn't going to keep him from having that again. No way.

Wearily from mowing the lawn, washing the car and an endless series of chores with no purpose but to save his lazy asshole of a stepfather, he fell into bed after dinner. Though the excitement of Monday's approaching pleasures distracted him from his sleep, he didn't mind.

Monday felt like Christmas morning. Barry

woke up knowing he was about to find the best gift of his life. He showered, shaved and put on his favorite black jeans. He drove across the valley and up the mountain quickly, arriving a half hour before Mr. Hardesty expected him.

He walked over to the cabin and tried the door. It was locked. He jiggled the knob and leaned against the rotting wood. The hinges screamed, buckled and popped from the dry timber. He stepped back surprised, then shifted the door aside and went into the darkened room.

The gurney was empty, the room clean, and all the tools neatly placed in containers or hung on the wall. The place smelled like a hospital; a dusty, weed-filled hospital. He walked to the wall, where just two days ago, he'd stood behind watching Mr. Hardesty. Above a pocked metal table there were photographs of before and afters. Barry moved closer in the murky glow from outside. The photographs were an unexpected treat.

In order of occurrence, he guessed, were the pictures of frightened looking boys and girls, bound and gagged, then mutilated into grotesque little crea-

Barry had stopped imagining his mother being tortured to death long ago.

tures Barry had only seen in totally off-the-wall horror flicks. He recognized the latest one, then stared at the one before it, another boy, then a girl, then a string of boys, five to be exact, then another girl. The scared faces, some crying, some catatonic, made Barry think of his own face as a child. He forced himself to stare at each before picture, then the tortured bodies. He felt the warmth spreading in his groin.

His eyes went from one grisly scene to the next, lighting momentarily on the before pictures. He pressed his fingers over his erection, leaning close as he surveyed the remaining photos. It seemed as the pictures got older, Mr. Hardesty's work appeared less fine than it had grown lately. He hadn't been as adventurous. He'd been quicker, cleaner, earlier on, a two or three step kill, and that was it.

Barry looked at the before pictures of his dad, his buddy Will Dinkens, at Tim Hardesty, then stopped. No. No way. His mind froze and he felt a buzzing in his ears, a growing numbness in his gut. No.

He spun around, his eyes fixed on a photo pinned to the side. Barry barely recognized her. It was Mrs. Hardesty! Mr. Hardesty had neatly hung her, cut off her breasts and gouged out her eyes. Barry's mother had told him Mrs. Hardesty was a whore, a home-wrecker. So maybe she'd hurt Mr. Hardesty, and he'd gotten back at her. No big deal. Barry turned to look back at the others. He couldn't look at the one of his dad. He had that laughing face, even in death.

But Tim? Mr. Hardesty's own son. Hadn't he tried to save him? And Will... Barry's only friend!

The flood of long buried memories of Will overwhelmed him. Will had become jealous of Mr. Hardesty's time with Barry back when Mr. Hardesty took to playing father. Will began to beg Barry to play with him, to invite him along with Barry on his trips with Mr. Hardesty, but Barry needed Mr. Hardesty too much then. Finally, when Barry's mother insisted he stop spending time with Mr. Hardesty, Barry turned to Will. They, once again, became inseparable.

The two boys often went to the hobby shop. Barry remembered Mr. Hardesty's hurt face, how lonely he said he was. One day Barry told Mr. Hardesty he was sorry, but that he couldn't be anybody's friend but Will's now. Mr. Hardesty got red-faced and walked away. Barry had felt so loved and in demand that day. More so than any other time in his life. He relished the attention and began spending all his free time with Will, and flaunting it at the hobby shop. Until Will disappeared.

Barry's mother told him some bullshit story about Will being kidnapped. For two years Barry waited for Will to be returned, then one day showed the pain deep down and forgot. Now he knew.

Anger swelled inside him, his vision narrowing to a red beam of pure hatred, his hands gripping the edge

of the table. He flipped the table up, scattering the tools laid out in neat rows, then bellowed:

"You Goddamned motherfucker! I hate you! How could you kill him? My only fucking friend!" He threw his head back and howled in pain. The cry was met with silence as tears streamed down his face in hiccuping sobs. He fell to his knees and began ehowing tools away with curled fingers.

He crawled over and pulled down the before picture of Will, jamming it into his pocket. He leaned against the wall then elumped into the corner quietly weeping. He heard the rumble of tires over the dirt road outside. Mr. Hardesty had arrived.

Barry stood up and met Mr. Hardesty where the door had once stood locked tight. Mr. Hardesty's face registered horror, then guilt. He frowned, and tried to sound angry.

"How did you get in here? Break the door down?"

Barry shouted at him. "I just leaned against it and it fucking broke. That's how I got in!" Barry shook his fists at Mr. Hardesty.

The man pushed past Barry and turned on the light. Barry spun around, his face in a grimace of rage. He bit his lip as Mr. Hardesty turned on him.

"You weren't supposed to come in until I took care of some things. Now you've made a mess!" Mr. Hardesty took a sharp tool from its seat on the wall by the door. He held it out before him.

Barry saw the gleam of the tool, but stepped toward Mr. Hardesty anyway. Mr. Hardesty acknowledged Barry's rage.

"Son, don't do this."

"You! The only person in this whole world I trusted, and now I find out you fucking killed my best friend?" Barry stood, weaving with unrestrained anger. Tears came again as he took the crumpled photo of Will from his pocket. "You killed him!"

Mr. Hardesty dropped the tool. He began to steel himself, then went limp. He hung his head.

"Yes, and his was the only death I regret." He wrung his hands, then looked to Barry, pleading. "I was so jealous of him back then Barry. You and he were constant companions, and me? I was painfully alone. I missed you so. I hoped your mother might relent, but...I learned to live with less of you. You have to know I loved you." He made a feeble attempt to reach out toward Barry.

Barry flinched at the words. "Love? Me?" No one had ever said those words to him before. Not a soul. "No."

"Let me explain. You might be able to forgive me if you knew."

"I don't think so, asshole."

Barry's words hit Mr. Hardesty like a shot. He jerked. "My God, what have I wrought with my foolish needs?" He looked to the ceiling and shook his fists.

"You're fucking nuts. Crazy." Barry was suddenly frightened. He felt cold, shivery. Mr. Hardesty got a look on his face Barry had never seen before. Like a mad dog.

"Well, maybe so, but then I learned a lot of awful truths back when Tim died. Like the fact that Tim was your father's child. I know my wife was a whore and that she'd been with many men before and after we were married. But I believed Tim was mine. Your father and my wife were...together." Mr. Hardesty waited for Barry's reaction, but Barry was etonefaced and numb. "He broke down and told me when he was about to die. Here. After I'd tried to save his little bastard a month before. Your father deserved to die. You know he hated you because..." Mr. Hardesty stopped.

Barry blinked, suddenly sobered. "What?"

"That was my fault, too. Him hating you. I was in love with your mother once, and she with me. In the beginning, just after I married my wife and I found her in bed with a neighbor man, your mother learned your

Barry saw the gleam of the tool, but stepped toward Mr. Hardesty anyway.

father was fooling around, too. So your mother and I sort of leaned on each other for support, until it got too close. We never dreamed my wife and her husband might do it with each other...that we, the cast-off victims could fall into bed..."

"So..." Barry wiped his arm across his wet face.

"So, you were born. Of our union. But your father refused to acknowledge you weren't his to the world. His pride—I understand that. He just let the town believe what seemed to be true, all the while hating you, me, and nearly starving your mother of love. I took care of him for you when he got sick, but I made sure he died. She didn't suspect it until a few years later, about the same time she made you stop spending time with me."

Barry nodded, stunned. "Was that why she made me stop seeing you?"

"Yes. All the people I took back then, I took because they kept me from you. Or they hurt you or your mother."

Including poor Will Dinkens. I wish I could bring him back, son. I truly do. I want to be a good father to you. More than anything."

Barry realized he had stopped crying and was listening; his jaw slackened, his stomach knotted. He shook his head. "My real father?"

Mr. Hardesty clasped his hands before his face. "I beg you to forgive me. To believe that what I am telling you is the truth. We belong together. We are meant to carry on this work. We have a bond. Something stronger than anything we can understand. Don't you feel it? How else could you have found me up here, watched me for so long and felt what you feel? That insatiable need."

Barry was riveted to the spot. He wanted to run away, run into Mr. Hardesty's arms, scream, cry, disappear. His head pounded.

Mr. Hardesty shook nervously. "Wait, let me show you what I brought us."

The man hurried past Barry to his van and slid open the side door. Inside, bound and gagged, was a five or six year old girl. She was naked and bruised from struggling. Barry stared at her as Mr. Hardesty carried her in and laid her down on the table. He thought of Amy Sue and his stomach rolled. The little girl had the same blond hair.

Mr. Hardesty washed her down with alcohol. Barry noticed the professionalism, the detached care. She cried softly as Mr. Hardesty lashed her to the table and removed the ropes.

"She's cursa." He turned to where Barry stood a few feet away. "She's flawed, as all women are. We can remake her in the image We mean for her. You and I." He trembled. "My body sings with absolute pleasure. Come closer."

Barry moved stiffly, automatically toward the

gurney.

"Feel her warmth. The life in her." Mr. Hardesty's hand caressed the child's flesh as she twisted and writhed beneath his touch.

Barry reached out and put his hand on her thigh. She jerked. He frowned at her, then touched her again. This time when she pulled away, something in him lurched forward out of the darkness. He gasped with the power of it.

Mr. Hardesty smiled. "You feel it. Good. Take the scalpel." He handed the tool to Barry. Taking a syringe from a stainless steel pan, he injected the girl with a sedative. "I will sew her mouth shut as you do the opening."

Barry watched while Mr. Hardesty expertly knit the now-slumbering girl's lips. He held the scalpel over her belly, waiting.

"Now." Mr. Hardesty beamed. The face of a proud father. The face Barry had seen on everyone else's father's face but his own. Or the father he'd thought was his own. There was so much stuff to process, now. He looked down at the skin, rising and falling beneath the scalpel.

The flesh parted easily. Blood oozed from the opening. Barry moaned.

"Yes, that's exactly right. You're a natural, son. You can feel it, can't you?"

Barry stared at the gore before him. Yes, he felt it. It was bigger than anything he had ever known. It eclipsed his hunger for love, his need for others, his anger and his pain. It was everything. He felt Mr. Hardesty's arm go around his shoulders and he smiled.

"Yeah. And I can sew her up and start all over again tomorrow, right?" Barry looked to the man expectantly. Mr. Hardesty nodded.

Both men looked back to the body on the gurney and adjusted their pants, their hands lingering there. Barry grinned widely. He could let it all go; the past full of rejections, the fears, the losses, the false hopes for a life of normalcy. He'd found a religion, a way of life. He'd found sanctuary.

He thought of how they would have to get Amy Sue up to the shack soon, after he fixed the door.

"This, is gonna be great...Dad." And he laid the scalpel neatly over the pink of the little girl's stomach

Roberta Lannes' first professional short story sale Goodbye Dark Love appeared in The Cutting Edge anthology in 1986. Since then, her stories have appeared in several anthologies and magazines including: Lord John 10, and the short story Saving the World at the New Moon Hotel appeared in the anthology Alien Sex. Her story Goodbye Dark Love will also appear in an upcoming anthology to be released later this year. Her newest story Invisible Boy will appear in British Fantasy Tales; edited by Steve Jones.

RESURRECTIONS

Edited By

George Clayton Johnson

Introductions By

George Clayton Johnson

Some things are hard.

Like writing an original, killer short story. Putting aside another attempt, a few months ago I was invited to a party at Dennis Etchison's home in the canyon. Among the throng heavily laced with writers I met three young guys.

Bright looking, alert, confident.

Buddy, Jesus, and Bill.

"We are publishing a new magazine," they said.

There, amidst fevered conversation, the clink of glassware, the aroma of food and the glitter of rich bookbindings, they told me about it. "We're calling it INIQUITIES: The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder," they said. They smiled innocently.

"We'll concentrate on all new stories by big name authors," said Buddy. "But we'll have stories by unknowns, too."

"We'll also have articles," said Jesus, "and interviews with the best people in the field."

"And several departments," said Bill, "with a special slant of their own."

I began to react to their ideas as they told me how they planned to format their publication.

Like a story conference, a bull session or a brainstorm, this kind of talk is one of my favorite forms of daydreaming.

"What about a reprint department?" I said. "A special section of the magazine set aside to showcase the writer. There are tremendous stories that hardly anybody has read, written by guys who have gone on to become world-class authors."

"That's right," exclaimed Jesus. "Many stories were only published in monthly magazines

that had limited circulation."

"That's right," said Buddy. "With one of those stories in each issue we can establish a standard of excellence for our contributors."

"That's right," said Bill. "It will give us a place to print overlooked stories written by writers at the top of their individual style."

"Stories by Bradbury and Block and Shekly," said Buddy.

"And Beaumont and Matheson and Ray Russell," said Jesus.

"And Van Vogt and Philip K. Dick and Theodore Sturgeon," said Bill.

With each recitation of names, our eyes grew brighter, our pulses quickened.

"And we'll call it 'Resurrections'," I said.

Seeing my excitement they said, "We'll do it. And we would be honored if you would edit the department and write an introduction to each story commenting on the author and his work to run in each issue."

"Sure," I said.

Some things are easy.

Introduction to Richard Matheson's "Witch War"

Much of the power of a short story is that it is short and because it is short it must be amazingly intense if it is to stick in the reader's mind for a lifetime.

It must compel belief.

It must contain an entire world, both the seen and the unseen.

It must make the reader look at everything around him with new eyes, unsettle all his precon-

ceptions, provide him with a greater truth, and, hopefully end with the last word.

Such stories are difficult to write.
I've tried.

Many of the writers that I know, and admire most have written several such stories, often early in their careers, which they sold to the popular magazines of the day where they were available for thirty days to be discovered by those who knew how to search, some of which have been later included in collections often with limited circulation, now long out of print.

"Witch War," by Richard Matheson, originally published in *Startling Stories*, is such a story.

In his introduction to the hardcover first edition of Richard Matheson's *BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN* (the Chamberlain Press, 1954), Robert Bloch, in commenting on Richard Matheson's short story "Lover When You're Near Me" says, "Matheson is utterly ruthless; he does not spare his characters, nor himself, nor the reader. All three go through hell—and he has created a genuine hell in this story."

Bloch has put his finger on Matheson's strongest characteristic as a writer. As evidenced in *I AM LEGEND*, *FURY ON SUNDAY*, "The Distributor", "The Traveller", and "Legion of Plotters", to name several of my all time favorites, Matheson is unrelenting.

And for this reason, enthralling.

If you want to catch Richard Matheson at his implacable best read "Witch War", "Lover When You're Near Me" and "Dance Of The Dead".

If you can take these three blows between the eyes you are made of strong stuff.

If you don't expect mercy from Richard it may help you to get through the experience.

That's his secret: He makes you experience what his characters go through.

That's his art: He continually finds the telling detail that will pull you in microscope close, that will make you see and believe.

That's his power: He convinces you he is telling the truth and not making anything up.

You may hardly notice that he rivets you with a terse, vibrant prose that is highly compressed—no word left unpolished, nor that his sentences look carved into the page—open, clear and uncluttered, alive with energy.

You may not notice his magical use of white space—very few are aware of such dynamic niceties. You may be one who only cares whether the story cools your blood, wires your nerves, fills you with dread and enlarges your consciousness.

But whether you view these particular stories through the eyes of a writer who hopes to comprehend the technical brilliance of his method or whether you take the story's measure through those sometimes sharper sensors, the nerve-ends, you can hardly

fail to be aware that you are dealing with the electric

intelligence of an original mind.

Nor can you fail to comprehend why I hold the writings of Richard Matheson in such high regard.

The man is a wizard.

We are proud to have George Clayton Johnson as contributing editor for Inquiries. His credits include: the novel Logan's Run, co-authored with William F. Nolan, Nothing In The Dark teleplay for The Twilight Zone, Kick The Can teleplay for The Twilight Zone among others. His short stories can be found in numerous anthologies and magazines, such as the last issue of Twilight Zone magazine, and many issues before that. Anthologies include: The Cutting Edge.

Witch War

By

Richard Matheson

Seven pretty little girls sitting in a row. Outside, night, pouring rain—war weather. Inside, toasty warm. Seven overalled little girls chatting. Plaque on the wall saying: P.G. CENTER.

Sky clearing its throat with thunder, picking and dropping lint lightning from immeasurable shoulders. Rain hushing the world, bowing the trees, peeking the earth. Square building, low, with one wall plastic.

Inside, the buzzing talk of seven pretty little girls.

"So I say to him—'Don't give me that, Mr. High and Mighty.' So he says, 'Oh yeah?' And I say, 'Yeah!'"

"Honest, will I ever be glad when this thing's over. I saw the cutest hat on my last fur-lough. Oh, what I wouldn't give to wear it!"

"You too? Don't I know it! You just can't get

your hair right. Not in this weather. Why don't they let us get rid of it?"

"Men! They make me sick."

Seven gestures, seven postures, seven laughter ringing thin beneath thunder. Teeth showing in girl giggles. Hands tireless, painting pictures in the air.

P.G. Center. Girls. Seven of them. Pretty. Not one over sixteen. Curls. Pigtales. Bangs. Pouting little lips—smiling, frowning, shaping emotion on emotion. Sparkling young eyes—glittering, twinkling, narrowing, cold or warm.

Seven healthy young bodies restive on wooden chairs. Smooth adolescent limbs. Girls—pretty girls—seven of them.

An army of ugly shapeless men, stumbling in mud, struggling along the pitchblack muddy road.

Rain a torrent. Buckets of it thrown on each exhausted man. Sucking sound of great boots sinking into oozy yellow-brown mud, pulling loose. Mud dripping from heels and soles.

Plodding men—hundreds of them—soaked, miserable, depleted. Young men bent over like old men. Jaws hanging loosely, mouth gasping at black wet air, tongues lolling, sunken eyes looking at nothing, betraying nothing.

Rest.

Men sink down in the mud, fall on their packs. Heads thrown back, mouths open, rain splashing on yellow teeth. Hands immobile—scrawny heaps of flesh and bone. Legs without motion—khaki lengths of worm-eaten wood. Hundreds of useless limbs fixed to hundreds of useless trunks.

In back, ahead, beside, rumble trucks and tanks and tiny cars. Thick tires splattering mud. Fat treads einking, tearing at mucky elime. Rain drumming wet fingers on metal and canvas.

Lightning flashbulbs without pictures. Momentary burst of light. The face of war seen for a second—made of rusty guns and turning wheels and faces staring.

Blackness. A night hand blotting out the brief storm glow. Wind-blown rain flitting over fields and roads, drenching trees and trucks. Rivulets of bubbly rain tearing scars from the earth. Thunder, lightning.

A whistle. Dead men resurrected. Boots in eucking mud again—deeper, closer, nearer. Approach to a city that bars the way to a city that bars the way to a...

An officer sat in the communication room of the P.G. Center. He peered at the operator, who sat hunched over the control board, phones over his ears, writing down a message.

The officer watched the operator. They are

coming, he thought. Cold, wet and afraid they are marching at us. He shivered and shut his eyes.

He opened them quickly. Visions fill his darkened pupils—of curling smoke, flaming men, unimaginable horrors that shape themselves without words or pictures.

"Sir," said the operator, "from advance observation post.

The officer got up, walked over to the operator and took the message. He read it, face blank, mouth parenthesized. "Yes," he said.

He turned on his heel and went to the door. He opened it and went into the next room. The seven girls stopped talking. Silence breathed on the walls.

The officer stood with his back to the plastic window. "Enemies," he said, "two miles away. Right in front of you."

He turned and pointed out the window. "Right out there. Two miles away. Any questions?" A girl giggled.

"Any vehicles?" another asked. "Yes. Five trucks, five small command cars, two tanks."

"That's too easy," laughed the girl, slender fingers fussing with her hair.

"That's all," said the officer. He started from the room. "Go to it," he added and, under his breath, "Monsters!"

He left. "Oh, me," sighed one of the girls, "here we go again."

"What a bore," said another. She opened her delicate mouth and plucked out chewing gum. She put it under her chair seat.

"At least it stopped raining," said a redhead, tying her shoelaces.

The seven girls looked around at each other. *Are you ready?* said their eyes. *I'm ready, I suppose.* They adjusted themselves on the chairs with girlish grunts and sighs. They hooked their feet around the legs of their chairs. All gum was placed in storage. Mouths were tightened into prudish fixity. The pretty little girls made ready for the game.

Finally they were silent on their chairs. One of them took a deep breath. So did another. They all tensed their milky flesh and clasped fragile fingers together. One quickly scratched her head to get it over with. Another sneezed prettily.

"Now," said a girl on the right end of the row.

Seven pairs of beady eyes shut. Seven innocent little minds began to picture, to visualize, to transport.

Lips rolled into thin gashes, faces drained of color, bodies shivered passionately. Their fin-

gers twitching with concentration, seven pretty little girls fought a war.

The men were coming over the rise of a hill when the attack came. The leading men, feet poised for the next step, burst into flame.

There was no time to scream. Their rifles slapped down into the muck, their eyes were lost in fire. They stumbled a few steps and fell, hissing and charred, into the soft mud.

Men yelled. The ranks broke. They began to throw up their weapons and fire at the night. More troops puffed incandescently, flared up, were dead.

"Spread out!" screamed an officer as his gesturing fingers sprouted flame and his face went up in licking yellow heat.

The men looked everywhere. Their dumb terrified eyes searched for an enemy. They fired into the fields and woods. They shot each other. They broke into flopping runs over the mud.

A truck was enveloped in fire. Its driver leaped out, a two-legged torch. The truck went bumping over the road, turned, wove crazily over the field, crashed into a tree exploded and was eaten up in blazing light. Black shadows flitted in and out of the aura of light around the flames. Screams rent the night.

Man after man burst into flame, fell crashing on his face in the mud. Spots of searing light lashed the wet darkness—screams—running coils, sputtering, glowing, dying—incendiary ranks—trucks cremated—tanks blowing up.

A little blonde; her body tense with repressed excitement. Her lips twitch, a giggle hovers in her throat. Her nostrils dilate. She shudders in giddy fright. She imagines, imagines...

A soldier runs headlong across a field, screaming, his eyes insane with horror. A gigantic boulder rushes at him from the black sky.

His body is driven into the earth, mangled. From the rock edge, fingertip protrude.

The boulder lifts from the ground, crashes down again, a shapeless trip hammer. A flaming truck is flattened. The boulder flies again to the black sky.

A pretty brunette, her face a feverish mask. Wild thoughts tumble through her virginal brain. Her scalp grows taut with ecstatic fear. Her lips draw back from clenching teeth. A gasp of terror hisses from her lips. She imagines, imagines...

A soldier falls to his knees. His head jerks back. In the light of burning comrades, he stares dumbly at the white-foamed wave that towers over him.

It crashes down, sweeps his body over the muddy earth, fills his lungs with salt water. The

tidal wave roars over the field, drowns a hundred flaming men, tosses their corpses in the air with thundering whitecaps.

Suddenly the water stops, flies into a million pieces and disintegrates.

A lovely little redhead, hands drawn under her chin in tight bloodless fists. Her lips tremble, a throb of delight expands her chest. Her white throat contracts, she gulps in a breath of air. Her nose wrinkles with dreadful joy. She imagines, imagines...

A running soldier collides with a lion. He cannot see in the darkness. His hands strike wildly at the shaggy mane. He clubs with his rifle butt.

A scream. His face is torn off with one blow of thick claws. A jungle roar billows in the night.

A red-eyed elephant tramples wildly through the mud, picking up men in its thick trunk, hurling them through the air, mashing them under driving black columns.

Wolves bound from the darkness, spring, tear at throats. Gorillas scream and bounce in the mud, leap at falling soldiers.

A rhinoceros, leather skin glowing in the light of living torches, crashes into a burning tank, wheels, thunders into blackness, is gone.

Fangs—claws—ripping. Teeth—screams—trumpeting—roars. The sky rains snakes.

Silence. Vast brooding silence. Not a breeze, not a drop of rain, not a grumble of distant thunder. The battle is ended.

Gray morning mist rolls over the burned, the torn, the drowned, the crushed, the poisoned, the sprawling dead.

Motionless trucks—silent tanks, wisps of oily smoke still rising from their shattered hulks. Great death covering the field. Another battle in another war.

Victor—everyone is dead.

The girls stretched languidly. They extend their arms and rotated their round shoulders. Pink lips grew wide in pretty little yawns. They looked at each other and tittered in embarrassment. Some of them blushed. A few looked guilty.

Then they all laughed out loud. They opened more gum packs, drew compacts from pockets, spoke intimately with schoolgirls whispers, with late-night dormitory whispers.

Muted giggles rose up fluttering in the warm room.

"Aren't we awful?" one of them said, powdering her pert nose.

Later they all went downstairs and had breakfast.



A work-in-progress excerpt from John Shirley's new novel "Wet Bones" forthcoming from Mark Zeising books.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

Ha Ha

By
John Shirley

Illustrations By
Rick Lieder

He chose her in Dresden's hardware store. She was working behind the counter, at cash register three. Maybe it was the faint configuration of freckles on her cheekbone, that reminded him of the negative constellation. The constellation Kali, that no one saw but him. Ephram Pixie. Who saw so much, ha ha, that no one else saw.

She was plump but pretty. Soft brown eyes with a little too much eyeliner and Tammy Faye-ish eyelashes. White gloss on her lips, lips that carried on the saffig theme of her body. Full breasts, for a girl, oh, sixteen or so. Hair like honey, but her hair was spoiled, charmingly spoiled, by being up in one of those strange do's that teenage girls have been affecting, a "pump": a little ridge of hair jutting five inches straight up above the forehead, bound in place by lots of big blowy curls. The aesthetic blindness of it fascinated him. Here was real innocence.

And she wore a little charm bracelet made of small gold hearts around one wrist.

About her neck was her name in gold hanging from a necklace. C-O-N-S-T-A-N-C-E. Constance? Oh, really? Ha ha.

She wore a raspberry colored dress, with a frilly collar. She wore raspberry colored Adidas tennis

shoes, that looked gauche with the dress, but again she was unaware of that. They weren't gauche at her high school, after all, ha ha.

Ephram was buying a coil of rope, as a matter of fact, when he saw her. It was quarter-inch soft white synthetic fiber, would have done very well to bind her. He'd still needed rope. But he was buying it for something else.

"Hi, how are you today," she said, automatically, not quite looking at him. Looking at the price tag and ringing him up.

"I'm glad you don't use those light pens to read the—what are they?—those little bar-things that computers read," Ephram said. Just get her to say a few more things to him. To dawdle there. Try to get a fix on her.

"Hm?" she said, blinking at him. "Oh, those computer price reading things? I wish we had them, actually, because, um, they're faster. The lines get long in here and everybody gets, you know, they want to get in and get out...That's three ninety-five."

"Here you are. Yes, well, that's a shame. I like...lingering here, myself. This is a charming hardware store. So cluttered and old fashioned."

She looked at him to try to decide if he was

serious. People didn't talk like that in her little world; words like *lingering*, describing a hardware store as charming. He smiled broadly at her. Not hoping to interest her in him, no, ha ha. He was a squat little man, with a soft wheel of fat around his middle, his oversized head mostly bald, a few colorless hairs slicked across it. An astrological glamour just barely visible, if you looked close, in the back of his deep-set green eyes. And if you looked closer...

He knew all she saw was a funny looking little fat guy grinning at her from the other side of the counter. She stared at him, beginning to feel the feathery antenna of his mind in her brain. And then another customer came up, and she turned gratefully to him: A black teenager with an ear-ring and a Mercedes Benz hood ornament hanging on a chain around his neck. He was buying spray paint. Fairly obvious what he was going to do with that, the vandal. Inexplicably, the girl squirmed with pleasure when the boy said something vaguely flirtatious; she shook her head, saying, "I'm sure." And snorted to suppress a giggle.

He really ought to be arrested for stealing that Mercedes Benz ornament off someone's car, Ephram thought, carrying the bag of rope out of the hardware store. Perhaps an anonymous tip to the police...

Laughing at himself for thinking it. *Absurd that I of all people should be thinking of calling the Police on anyone...Ha ha.*

When Garner saw Constance coming up the walk, he found himself looking to see how steadily she walked, and if she had any sort of glaze in her eyes. There was no reason at all to suppose his daughter was on drugs. Really, there was none. She stayed out too late sometimes, she didn't take school seriously—she worked in spurts to maintain a C average—but she was a careful girl, in most ways, and she didn't smoke or drink. As far as he knew.

Probably unrealistic to think she'd never had a drink. It was fucking 1990, man. The kids drank or were scorned.

But when your old man is a drug counselor—three days a week, when he wasn't doing pastoral work—you probably didn't get into drugs. Did you?

"How was work?" he asked when she came in, knowing how she'd answer.

"Okay, I guess," she said. As always. What was there to say about working in a hardware store for the summer?

She put her purse down on the hall table, and she thought about telling her that her skirt was too short, and then stopped himself. Amazed, not for the first time, to find he was turning into his own father. In the 60s, when Palmer had come of age, he would have considered Constance's skirt prudishly long.

Garner was sitting on the living room couch. He looked out the picture window at the sunny suburban yard. July in California.

Somewhere above them, in the province of passenger jets and the birds that choked on the jets' exhaust, a cloud drew itself over the sun. The shadow spilled slowly and inexorably across the lawn. "Hey Daddy Dude," Constance said, sitting down across from him, feet tucked partly under her. She had those awkward little white socks they were wearing now, and a thin gold anklet bracelet. In the 60s she'd have had white go-go boots. A least she hadn't got a waist-pak yet.

Garner was wearing jeans, sneakers—the real Converse kind which were hard to find—and his Street

Ministry t-shirt. He knew the trappings of his ministry embarrassed her a little, but she liked the t-shirt because its ghetto-mural design was at least marginally hip. He knew she was proud of him too because he was cooler than lots of other Dads. He let her stay out later, let her watch what she wanted, was tolerant of

profanity up to a point, let her go to rock concerts, never said a word about loud music. She liked his being politically liberal—although she really had nothing much, despite his efforts, in the way of genuine political insight of her own. She simply knew that it was hipper to be liberal, because MTV was slanted that way. They both liked the Rolling Stones. He wished she'd known her mother. For one thing, her mother would know how to tell her she wore too much makeup...

"Daddy Dude—" Constance began, smiling sweetly.

"Let me guess. The car. Had your license two months and you think you get to wheedle the car—"

"I'm sure, it's not like that's the only thing I ever talk to you about—wanting something, I mean—"

"Not the only thing, no. But when you call me Daddy Dude, it's a dead giveaway."

"Whatever. Daddy...Daddy Dad. We just want to go to the mall and the arcade. Me and Terry. She wants to shop for shoes and stuff."

"I'm staying around here this evening because we're having a counseling group. So yeah okay. But if you hurta my car I breaka you face."

She laughed. Then her expression became

He smiled broadly at her. Not hoping to interest her in him, no, ha ha.

almost comically earnest. "Did anybody call for me?"
 "No, hon. He didn't call, whoever he is. What's his name? Is he in puberty yet?"

"Da-ad! I'm sure! You are so dweebis."

Ephram thought about doing away with Brandy. He thought about it as he drove his '88 Porsche to the condo he'd rented near the beach in Alameda. It was a sweet summer evening to drive by the beach, a few clouds strikingly purple against the lemon glow of the horizon. It was an evening to savor, an epicurean's evening, and Ephram regarded himself as the last word in epicureans.

A nice night to do away with Brandy. She was mostly used up. There wasn't much left but the sticky, impure stuff at the bottom of the bottle that was her brain.

He always thought of it that way: *Doing away*. It was such a pleasingly euphemistic expression. It made him think of the way Valentine Michael Smith had rid the world of unwanted people in that novel, that bit of silliness from the 60s. *Stranger In...* something. Valentine Smith would simply think them out of existence. *Doing away*.

He couldn't do that with Brandy or the others—just think them out of existence when he was done with them—and having to...do away with them physically, personally, was his least favorite part of the whole process. It was, quite simply, a mess. There was no truly pristins doing away, he thought. Not even incineration. There was always a mess of some kind. A cadaver leaving its signature on the scene, if only a little grease and ash.

Ephram arrived at the cluster of two-story condos, pressed the door signal that would let him into the parking lot. The gate lurched a little, then rolled aside. He drove through and neatly into his parking place. He was not a man to waste movements.

He went into his condo without bothering to check his mailbox. There shouldn't be anything in it except bills and trash. No one knew his was here. And of course there was no one alive who would write him a letter, anyway.

Brandy was where he'd left her, under the sink, in the bathroom. Part of her naked pale pink-white body set aglow by a long bar of light that expanded from the hall when he opened the door. She was curled up, around the pipes under the sink, like a snail around a small stem, her back to the door. Her long red hair—now matted and oily—fanned across the

bathroom tiles. Freckles across her back. He often chose freckly girls. He invariably saw signs and omens in the configurations of their markings.

She groaned when he switched on the bathroom light, but of course, she couldn't move. He hadn't given her leave to move. She was still cerebrally locked.

He reached out with an exploratory impulse, the probe making her shudder and gag a little as it passed through her skull. He tasted the pleasure centers. The reward receiver of the brain, as Ephram thought of it. There was some capacity left. Some cells not yet wrung out. More than he'd thought. Best use her once more before she doing away. Waste not, wanton. *Ha ha*.

He first had to unlock her brain. He reached out mentally, and undid the partial paralysis. She spasmed like a sick dog, and sobbed, and turned over on her back. The marks he'd made were scabbing over rather badly. This really did have to be the last time.

She tried to speak, managed to croak,

She groaned when
 he turned on the bath-
 room light, but of
 course, she didn't move.

"Listen...just
 onces...listen...I can't be-
 lieve you don't...you
 can't..."

"You should be-
 lieve it," he said, sending
 a probe into her punish-
 ment receiver. She gave
 out a cawing sound; the
 only scream she could
 manage anymore, and

arched her back.

Ephram felt his penis harden. A bit, anyway.

He moved to stand beside the bathtub and said, "Come over here, and straddle the side of the tub. Facing me."

"Not...not this..."

Psychically, he speared her again. She writhed again, and tried to weep but the tears were long since dried up. Her lips were cracked from dehydration. He reached over and turned on the water, started the shower going, lukewarm. Then he said, again, "Straddle it." And he mentally touched her reward receiver; grasped that special locus in her brain strongly, almost squeezed it like a sponge. She struggled, but the pleasure rippled through her, released by the master switch that was at the center of all biological switchboards...

Raspiily sobbing, she struggled across the floor to the bathtub, and climbed onto its rim. Ephram reached over and switched on the portable cassette stereo—what people called a "ghetto blaster", ha ha—and Mozart unreel sweetly from its speakers and bounced from the tiles. He grabbed her by the hair and pushed her under the shower to lubricate her. He unzipped his pants. His psychic electrode found the last

SHIRLEY

pleasure receiver that could still be stimulated in her...She wailed and began, involuntarily, to hump the rim of the tub...He put a hand around her throat, and directed his semi-erect penis into her crusted mouth...

A minute after the Mozart cassette ended, he withdrew from her suddenly, as she died. Withdrew from her mentally, not physically. He played with the body for a while.

He wasn't sure if he'd killed her with the choking, or if she'd simply died from being used up, from exhaustion. She was rather emaciated. It didn't matter.

Now he had to clean up the mess.
There was always a downside, in life.

"Did Constance come back there, Mr. Garner?"

"What? Isn't she with you, Terry?" Garner told the cold, clutching hand to let go of his esophagus. Constance's friend Terry was calling from the mall arcade --he could hear the video arcade going bing, bam, bong, in the background. The girl was looking for Constance, who was supposed to be with her. But there could be a lot of explanations. "Terry..."

"No, uh--she was, but, it's like, she goes, 'I'm gonna go to the restroom', you know? And I'm like, 'Okay but hurry up because you have to drive me home before eleven or my Dad'll get really gross on me, you know?' And she's all, 'I'll be right back!' But then she doesn't come back and doesn't come back--"

"She hasn't come back here either. Did you check for her car?"

"No. You think she'd, you know, actually ditch me at the mall like that?"

"No. I just want to make sure she's still in the mall somewhere. Can you check and call me back?"

"Um. Sure. 'Bye."

They hung up and Garner went back to the group. Nothing he could do till she called back. Just get on with the group and try not to think about it. If you freaked out every time your kid misplaced herself for a few minutes, you'd get some kind of chronic stress syndrome.

The group went on for ten minutes, with Mrs. Wineblatt wallowing in self pity about her deteriorating marriage; the others struggling bravely to keep their interest, though they'd heard it all a half-dozen times and generally felt she was playing out some heavy denial about a necessary divorce...

Garner shook his head, thinking that his attitude toward Mrs. Wineblatt was slanted by his anxiety. Mrs. Wineblatt seemed whiny and snively, and Harry Dugan seemed like an irritating old cynic, and Jimmy seemed like a pouty, self indulgent college student. Damn Constance. This kind of thing was just not on. She had to be responsible, because he had to be

responsible...

Or maybe. Maybe someone. Maybe she...

The doorbell rang. Garner announced the end of the group rather abruptly and nearly sprinted to the front door. Expecting to find a cop with a long face on his doorstep.

But on his doorstep was a twenty-five year old white woman, six months pregnant. Aleutia Berenson. He'd been counseling her, on and off. She was a crack addict.

"Come on in, Aleutia," he forced himself to say, looking up and down the street for some sign of Constance as Aleutia pushed sullenly past him into the house.

He escorted Aleutia into his study and she sat on the sofa. This wasn't the appointed counseling day for Aleutia, but he made time for pregnant women with drug problems. For the baby's sake.

His face may have been a little wooden, though. Waiting for the phone to ring. For Terry to call back. What was taking so long?

From the Journal of Ephram Pixie, "for 5 January, 1986":

...Number Seven is responding more readily than Six did, and I am convinced that the difference is in me, rather than in her. After all, Number Six responded more readily than Number Five did. The Divine Talent is quickening in me. It is emerging and strengthening. Whatever spirit put this Talent in me (I do feel that it is a Spiritual Power of some kind, intended to elevate me to the Transcendence I have always known is fated to me, known even when I was a Professor of, bowing and scraping to get tenure)... At any rate, I feel the spirit is beginning to merge with me, to take part in my Celebrations. I feel the Spirit's enjoyment, the way a great solo violinist senses the rapture of the audience at a recital. Indeed, I can feel the spirit participating, sharing with me all that I experience when I employ this Celestial Gift. Although I have never seen this Presence with my physical eyes, I felt it sharply last night as I used Seven on the deserted pebble beach, and looked up at the stars, and saw the unseen stars between the bright ones, the Negative Constellation, the secret Zodiac that guides the lives of the world's secret masters...Zodiac signs no one but me and perhaps, a few others, have seen...The sign of the Lamprey. The Sign of the

Cobra. The sign of the Judge. The sign of the Spider. The Sign of Kali. The Sign of the Sow. The Sign of the Hangman...

"I just don't see how you can expect me to believe in God, with all this shit coming down in the world," Aleutia said. She was thinner—except for the pooch of her swollen stomach—and there were hollows under her eyes. Her blond hair had been tightly corn rowed by someone, and woven with cheap beads. She had four-inch fingernails, painted gold, curling like the nails of a tree-tooth. These were emblems of ghetto culture, Garner knew, which probably meant that she was back living with Donald again. He decided to ask her point blank. Theological issues were for later. (Why didn't Terry call?)

"You're back with Donald, aren't you?"

"And you think that's bad, right, because he's a black man."

"Hell no, not because he's a black man, because he's a crack addict, Aleutia, and he's got you back on the shit."

She broke down, then, and he put his arm around her and patted her and she said she was sorry. She knew it was hurting the baby, but she just found herself over there one day looking for Donald. Looking for rock cocaine...

Then she repeated the same question he'd evaded earlier. "How can there be a God? I mean, I just don't see I had any fucking choice in this shit. My old man molesting me, my step-dad raping me, I had to run away, nothing else to do but be a whore when you're fourteen, and then you end up...I mean, I don't see how it coulda happened any other way. So how could God put me in that kind of shit?"

Another style of minister might have invoked the Book of Job, or discussed the folly of trying to understand God's mysterious motives. But people like Aleutia came to Garner because he didn't bullshit them. "I don't know, Aleutia. I feel like God isn't some kind of great simple divine power that's in control of everything—God, He or She or It, whatever—God's trying to organize the world into some kind of harmony but can't always manage it. But that doesn't mean there isn't love in the world trying to reach us. I mean, I'm here talking to you, right?"

She shook her head. Shivering. She was having a strong craving now, he knew. Putting her hand to her mouth as if imagining a crack stem, the glass pipe, in her fingers.

Looking at her, he saw a little girl. Not much

older than his own kid. It made him ache with worry about Constance. He thought: I'd better call the cops, tell them Constance is missing...

No. He knew what they'd say: It hadn't been long enough. Give her time. And if they picked her up somewhere when nothing was wrong she'd be so mad at him...

He forced himself to concentrate on Aleutia. "Look, Aleutia—you had a cocaine relapse, that's all. It's easy. You don't know what you're up against. Crack gets you two ways, see. It gets you psychologically—because, you know, getting off is a way of escaping from all the nagging worries we've all got about ourselves. Right? Addictive personalities. We've talked about that. Second—and this is important, Aleutia—it gets you neurologically."

"Say what?"

"Neuro...Uh—it messes with your brain chemistry. It pushes your brain-buttons, so to speak. You ever see that film of the white rat that's got a wire running into its brain—into the pleasure center of the

Ephram was sitting in his living room, at the desk, writing in his journal...

brain? The rat pushes a button to stimulate that part of the brain, and it becomes a button-pushing machine. That's all it can do after that. Till it dies. It reprogrammed itself that way."

"Oh God, that's fucked up." Her face crumpled with despair. "What're you saying, we're like fucking robots? Programming and shit?" Tears streaked her makeup.

"Listen! We're only like that...up to a point. There are ways out. We can cut the wire, Aleutia. Crack reprograms you. You have to understand that so you know what you're fighting. It reprograms your brain using the pleasure-reward system and the depression-punishment system, pushes you into using the stuff that way, more and more. That's how you get to be so...compulsive about it. And you get trapped. Neurologically trapped."

"It's like a fucking roach motel," she said miserably.

He nodded, thinking about the baby in her belly: trapped in the trapped. He took a deep breath. "But if you get help from someone who's not programmed that way, if you stay away from the stuff that traps you, eventually—it takes a while, but eventually, you can get free. It takes time, see, for the brain to get normal, biochemically. And holding on until then takes help from outside the trap. But you've got to realize it isn't beatable overnight and it isn't something you can do alone—"

The phone rang. Aleutia was startled as he lunged at it. "Yeah?"

SHIRLEY

"Mr. Garner? This is Terry. Um—her car's there. But I swear—she's just not in this mall. All the stores are closed."

Ephram was sitting in his living room, at the desk, writing in his journal, listening to Franz Schubert. The old fashioned rolltop was the only piece of furniture in the room, except for the LA-Z-Boy recliner by the CD player.

Ephram wrote in his journal to soothe himself, after the profound irritation of the labors he'd undertaken. He wrote, "For 18 July 1989":

...found that the large wire clippers worked very well to remove her fingertips, and disposed of the fingertips quite confidently off a pier, fingerfood for the crabs, ha ha. Disposed of the clippers the same way. The body presented another problem, and as planned tied it to the underside of the train. It had to be carefully timed, in order to avoid discovery of the body by the railroad workers before the train should begin its work. All went well. The train dragged the body a goodly distance, face down on the cinders, making shreds of the face and many other details, so that identification will be difficult...I of course used the blowtorch to remove body hair...Perhaps a full incinerator would be ideal after all, and when I find another wealthy subject I will shore up my bank account and make the appropriate investigations...After disposing of Twenty-six, I traced Twenty-seven, finding her outside the lady's restroom at the Eastbay Mall...

Garner almost collapsed with relief when he saw Constance coming up the sidewalk. He didn't think about the odd way she was walking, didn't think about it consciously at least, till she came into the kitchen with him. Then one incongruity after another hit him.

"Where's your necklace?" She was never without that tacky gold-letter necklace that spelled out her name.

"Hm?" She looked at him from the other side of a fog bank. "Um—I don't know." Indifferent. Normally she'd have run around like a decapitated chicken, losing that necklace.

She looked tired, too. She didn't smell like rock smoke or pot, but...all the other signs were there.

REWARD

Wobbly on her feet. Not meeting his eyes. Distancing. Indifference to what used to be important to her.

How could it happen so fast? It just didn't happen that way overnight. He must have missed it, sometime before...

"What is it, hon?" he said gently. "Was it cocaine or what?"

"What do you mean?" Her voice dreamily. Normally she would have said, *Da-ad! I'm sure! Gross!* "Where's the car, Constance? I didn't see it outside."

"Car?" She blinked. Twice. "Oh. God. I left it at the mall. I'm sorry." She smiled distantly. "Happiness comes in places you never expect. Didn't you say that once, Dad?"

"Uh—yeah."

"You were right. I would never expect...a guy like..." Suddenly she shut her mouth. With a snap. It was as if some unseen hand had clapped it shut for her.

"A guy like who? Did someone give you drugs, Constance?"

"No." With soft-spoken conviction. Convincing understatement.

"You fall in love?" Maybe that explained it. That was a kind of drugging. "Falling in love" released hormones and endorphins, made you feel drugged sometimes. He knew it was grasping at straws but he grasped it anyway.

"Sort of."

"Sort of? Who with? Some guy you met at the mall?"

"Yeah. He's leaving town though. His name's...Michael. And he's leaving town. And I can't stand to stay around this summer without him. So could I go visit his family in Los Angeles? They'll chaperon us."

She was a little more animated now, and she was explaining all this with an uncharacteristic verbal clarity. Maybe it was just love, after all. "This is pretty sudden. Can't I meet this guy before you take trips with his family? I mean, you only met him yourself today."

"Um—sometime. You can meet him sometime. I better go pick up the car, okay?"

"I'll go with you."

She frowned, but she didn't argue.

As the evening wore on, she continued to deny any drug use. Quite convincingly, though with a weird sort of detachment. She went up to her room to go to bed early that night.

He heard her sneaking out the back door at about one a.m...

A virgin, certainly. In more ways than one, Ephram decided. They were in a motel room Ephram



had rented. More or less the generic fifty dollar motel room. Ephram had decided it would be stupidly risky bringing another young girl up to his condo. And the Pakistani people who ran the motel had not seen him bring the girl in, later on. It was an "adult" motel, out near the Oakland airport, which meant that it had a pornography channel on the televisions. Constance and Ephram sat side by side on the bed, lazily drinking wine and watching the pornography channel. Actually, Ephram only pretended to drink wine. It dulled his control.

She watched the video-snowy close-ups of intersecting genitalia; watched it bligeyed and with some confusion—but happily, contentedly, because he'd pushed the appropriate buttons in her brain. She could watch a Roto Rooter man clean out a sewer now, and find equal delight in it.

She was more deliciously innocent than Brandy had been. She had never before watched pornography —though she'd had an opportunity once to watch "a dirty video" at the house of a friend, as she'd babblingly told Ephram on that first wave of the psychic high. She'd said no, wrinkled up her nose at the chance to watch movies of people reproducing. Till now. She thought about boys in terms of romance and dancing and dating and a little kissing, mostly, and read teenage romance novels which were so chaste there was scarcely even a kiss before the end of the book. She had never even masturbated. She had seen pictures of male genitals, and her Dad told her anything about sex she wanted to know quite freely, in a clinical sort of way, and she knew how to have sex without getting pregnant or diseased. And she was curious about the act. Until now, only mildly curious.

Ah, he thought: Curiouser and curiouser, ha ha.

Being hardly more than a child, she'd never

really had the *desire*, until Ephram rewired her for it, using the associative technique he'd perfected with Numbers Nine through Fifteen.

It was ever so simple. You subjected the female to the pleasure-receiver stimulus, continued it as you subjected her to certain kinds of visual input, and then physical input. After receiving enough induced pleasure coupled with the sexual input, the subject associated all pleasure with that input, and her complicity became quite implacable and compulsive. Even frenzied—at least for a time, until the fugues and sloughs of despond began to set in. Even then, one could always squeeze a few more drops from the sponge, if one was proficient...

The master switch supervised the other circuits of the brain. Supervened over choices, native character, self respect, self image or hope.

And then of course there was the punishment. An essential part of the programming and, lately, increasingly of interest to the jaded appetites, ha ha, of Ephram Pixie. And to Ephram's friend; his unseen companion.

The "ghetto blaster" was playing a certain Beethoven string quartet which had an astrological significance to Ephram—significance in the esoterics of the negative astrology—and the people on the little wall-mounted TV screen were copulating with energy, albeit no real enthusiasm, when he at last began to fondle Constance.

She shied a bit at first, though grinning with the waves of pleasure he was sending through her. She made some tentative effort to escape him. But already her hips were making the involuntary humping motions, already the drugged look was so deep in her eyes all personality was drowned in it, and he knew he had his fingers on the strings of this pretty little marionette.

He made plans for her. He could make her love anything. He could make her love the bottom of his shoes. He could make her sate a German Shepherd. He could make her plead to drink his piss and sigh with contentment when it was provided. He could make her—as he had Number Twenty-one, who had been an enthusiast for the Humane Society—take delight in torturing small animals and then rolling naked in their half-vivisectioned bodies as they squealed and died. He could make her love a mouse trap, or a dead cat, or the taste of dog food; he could make her take pleasure in mutilating herself with scissors. She would beg him to let her mutilate herself with scissors a second time, if he gave her the pleasure-waves when the first mutilation began. He could make her deeply desire to clasp her toenails with her teeth. He could make her take joy in masturbating in a bathtub full of earthworms...Or he could force her to do things, with the Punishment. He could force her to eat a pigeon alive—and use punishment to make her do it even when she had no pleasure in it. Or, he could induce her to love eating a pigeon alive. To experience bliss in it.

He could even make her want to kill her own father.

From the journal of Ephram Pixie, "9 May 1987":

It has always ruled us, of course, no matter what we are doing. If we feel a little pleasure at having cleaned out a file box, it is the brain rewarding the pleasure receiver. If a person feels a little regret at having hurt someone—it is the punishment receiver that experiences the regret as an inward pang. If we feel a little happiness in the smell of a breeze, or the fit of a shoe, or the taste of ice cream, or the thrill of taking part in an athletic competition, or the sense of having done a good day's work, or the good feeling that some people experience on performing acts of charity—the happiness is simply the brain rewarding the animal as it has been programmed to do. It has its sociobiological reasons for all of it. Sometimes the rewards and punishments come in tiny little increments, so small we're scarcely aware of them...We're constantly moving to the choreography of reward and punishment...Beyond it, of course, is the audience at this grotesque ballet, the invisible world. Through the invisible world, and an understanding of the dark astrology, it is quite possible to transcend the tyranny of the choreographer, the Great Programmer

of Reward and Punishment. But this transcendence is given to only a few of us...

Garner had almost lost the Mercedes at the traffic light on Fifteenth. He'd had to run the light, risk the police and a wreck, and risk that whoever was in the Mercedes would notice him.

A Mercedes. Not something a teenage kid drove. Something a drug dealer drove.

Now he sat in his '83 Toyota, outside the motel, trying to decide what exactly to do. He hadn't realized they were actually going into the motel, at first. He'd thought they were going to the apartment building next door. *But a motel.* Any doubts about what was up were banished. His only doubt now was about the next move. Did he really want the police in on this? She could end up in custody. If he charged in without the police, though, they could both end up dead. The man would be armed. Whoever he was. Palmer hadn't seen him clearly.

Garner felt some guilt at following her. A pang at his sense that he had betrayed his daughter's trust in him. Turned into one of the Over Thirty monsters Abbie had warned them not to trust. But on some other level, he knew that following her was the right thing to do. The truth will set you free. And this was the way to get the truth. Seeing Aleutia today had made him determined.

Not my daughter. I won't have her trapped like that. Even if I have to be an asshole about it and follow her, just to be sure.

He'd almost had himself convinced it hadn't been drugs. You who talk about the mote in your friend's eye, take the beam out of your own, pal. He'd been hiding in his own denial. And then he'd heard that back door open, and knew instantly...

He made up his mind about what to do. He got out of the car, opened the trunk, and found the tire iron.

He walked around to the motel room, and tried the knob. The door was unlocked. He took a deep breath, and opened it. He stepped inside.

He stepped into glue. A world of glue.

He couldn't move. He couldn't see.

Someone took the tire iron from his hand. He heard the door close behind him. Everything else was gray and endlessly inert.

Constance was beginning to suspect that this wasn't a dream. As the waves of pleasure receded, she began to feel the rug under her bare feet. It scraped at her. She could feel the air on her skin, sticky, foul. She could feel the weight of the metal rod in her hand. She could see,

quite clearly now, the look on her father's face.

It was empty.

The one who'd called himself Michael—she knew now that wasn't his name—had taken control of her father's brain. Michael had a pinched look of concentration, as if he were having difficulty keeping a grip on both of them.

Maybe she could fight him now...

Pain like a rain of fire. Pain raining over her skull, burning down her spine. Malicious and all-consuming and beyond screaming about.

"Please," she heard herself say.

"Raise the tire iron over your father's head," Ephram told her. He sounded happy, though he had to grunt the words out through his concentration.

She obeyed instantly, hoping it would make the pain stop. The pain diminished a great deal, but didn't stop. Not quite.

"Drive the tire iron through your father's right eye," Ephram said. He enjoyed saying that it was her father's right eye. She could tell.

"No," she said. It was all she could get out.

The pain this time compared to the previous time like a forest fire to a single campfire. It consumed the world and all her senses and every last shred of her was looking for a way out.

It was easy to get out. Just push the tire iron into...

But her father's face appeared through a veil of fire. No. No.

The pain was unspeakable. She was knotted with nausea; she was wrung out by the hands of an ice giant.

She drew her arm back and aimed the tire iron, and struck.

It struck where she'd aimed it: at the side of her father's head. She tried not to think about what she hoped to get away with...

Her father went down, blood splattering, coursing from the headwound. But he was alive.

She heard someone laugh. Two short monosyllables. Like, Ha ha. "I'm not stupid, my dear. Do it for real this time. Bend over him..."

There were sirens in the distance. She waited. The man who called himself Michael waited.

The sirens warbled into a lower register, and faded away.

Oh no, oh no.

But the sirens had given Ephram pause. Who knew for sure this man hadn't alerted anyone? Per-

haps they'd be along any minute. And a corpse, here. Mesey, as always. A problem.

If he killed the girl's father, and if the father had told the cops where he was going, perhaps just before coming in...

Well. They might get a description of Ephram from the Pakistanis. They had his taken his car's license number down.

If dad here didn't turn up dead, the police would be less inclined to search out Ephram. And they wouldn't take the man so seriously. After all, he'd seen nothing—he couldn't swear his daughter was in here. Evidently he'd seen her get into the car, though. Even so...she was old enough they'd regard runaway rather than as a kidnapping. There'd been no struggle. Not a visible one.

And he could force the girl to write a letter to her father and the police from somewhere safe.

He had some new plans for this girl. He planned to redesign her, with reward and punishment. Instead of killing her, he could make her into a happy and

carnal accomplice. For a while. He'd hate to have to give her up now just to make escape more feasible.

Ephram sighed. "I will be generous, girl. Your father will live. He is quite unconscious, but he will live. We will move him out to his car, and then we'll be going to our own. I'll need to get

rid of it soon. Bother...

But, really, this was quite exciting. How much better it was, without the Akiehra diverting him from his divine inspirations.

Where would he take the girl now? He wondered, bending to lift the father up, make him look like a drunk supported between him and the girl.

Someplace they could fit right in he and the girl. Someplace it wouldn't look strange for a man his age to be traveling with a girl her age. Someplace corrupt enough to provide camouflage.

Wasn't it obvious? Los Angeles.

Garner was walking out through the emergency room, head throbbing, the sight in his left eye partly obscured by the bandage around his head. He was slipping out of the hospital. They wanted him for observation. He was on his way to the cops.

When he heard Aleutia's voice. Whimpering, pleading.

He turned and saw her in one of the alcoves, lying on a hospital bed under heaps of ice. Broken chunks of ice.

Pain like rain on
fire. Pain raining
over her skull, burn-
ing down her spine.

SHIRLEY

He knew what the ice meant. It was a last ditch treatment to lower a soaring body temperature. A killing fever that came with crack overdose.

She was dying. And the baby...

Two nurses and a doctor worked over her. Machinery beeped softly as it monitored her vital signs. She lay there motionless, now. She'd stopped whimpering, stopped squirming.

"We're losing her again," the doctor said, his voice flat.

"Where's the obstetrician?" one of the nurse's said, sounding like she was fighting hysteria.

Garner wanted to go to Aleutia, hold her hand, try to reach her. But he was afraid of getting in the way. He just stood there and Prayed.

A minute later, as he watched, the heart monitor flatlined. A single, empty tone, whistling into forever. She was gone. They tried CPR; they failed.

"What about the caesarian?" a nurse said.

"We've already lost the baby too," the surgeon said.

I prayed into a vacuum, Garner thought bitterly.

The cops. Go to the cops. Tell them about Constance. Find her.

Mouth dry, head thumping, Garner walked on wobbly legs to the exit. *We've lost the baby too.*

"Me too," Garner said, aloud, to no one in particular. "Lost my baby too..."

Or, maybe, he'd said it to God.

REWARD

John Shirley is the author of the horror novels Cellars, In Darkness Waiting, and Dracula In Love (an early novel which has just been re-released by Zebra books). Scream/Press has published his acclaimed short story collection HEATSEEKER.

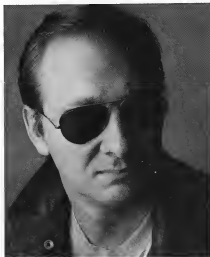


Photo: Shelly Scott

NEXT MONTH:

Iniquities **Peter Straub** issue! Featuring a new short story, interview, and bibliography. A short guide to Peter Straub!

Also Featured: new fiction by **Steven R. Boyett**, **William F. Nolan**, the **Craig Spector** interview, the first part in **Joe Lansdale's** three part article on horror writing; **Lansdale Raves!**, our first installment of **SPHERES**, and much, much more!

Make sure to catch our ad in this issue to take advantage of our **Clive Barker** prints give away!

We urge our readers to:

Send us your letters and comments on Iniquities, your input is greatly appreciated. Be as straight forward as you like, we can handle it. Letters will be published in our **SCREAMS FROM THE MASSES** column in the next issue, so get that stationary out and warm up those word processors, we love it! Space is also available for classified ads.

Rates for classifieds are \$5 per line. Limit: 45 characters per line. Minimum: 3 lines. Small display ads: \$40. per column inch (3 column format). Camera ready only! Punctuation, symbols and spaces counted as characters. Word(s) of your choice in first line only, will be bolded when underlined. Make all checks, money orders payable to Iniquities. Mail to:

Iniquities
167 N. Sierra Bonita Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91106

First time subscribers and renewals are entitled to one free non-commercial classified ad. Personals are printed at the discretion of the editors.

IRRATIONAL **INQUIRIES**

Premiere Issue!

Edited By Buddy Martinez

50¢

The Big Texas Weed-Eater Massacre:

Did it really Happen?

Necrophilia:

If your sex-mate is boring in bed, why not just kill them?

Lobotomy Quiz:

Can you do one? 13 easy questions will tell if you are qualified.

Zombies:

Keep your skin from decaying. 12 detailed, easy-to-follow steps!

Find out how to be sickening!

Tips on dress, hygiene and attitude.

Next issue: Snot Sucking!



Photo: courtesy of G. Hof

"I swear it, they had three hooters!"

Terrified Nacogdoches writer encounters female UFO strippers in his own back yard!

See the actual sketches drawn while under hypnosis.

Joe Lansdale encounters female UFO strippers

Reported By
I. Sawitt

On July 11, 1990, at three forty-five A.M., central time, Joe Lansdale was awakened by a loud humming sound coming from his backyard. Using caution, he went to investigate. The surrounding area of his residence is thickly wooded, making his field of view difficult. Upon further investigation, he stumbled upon what seemed to be a large glowing doughnut with a cone centered in its middle. Two long antennas extended from the tip of the cone with blinking lights on each of them. He assessed immediately that it must be a UFO.

Making his way toward the ship, he stumbled and hit his head on a rock, rendering himself unconscious.

When he woke, he found himself inside what appeared to be the interior of the spaceship. Strapped to a table, he was helpless. After what seemed like hours had passed, two aliens entered the room dressed in lingerie, garter belts, stockings, corsets, and six-inch spiked pumps. The oddest thing Joe noticed about the aliens was that they had three breasts, or what appeared to be three breasts.

"I swear it," he told reporters, "they had three hooters!"

After a lengthy and personal examination performed on him

by the aliens, he was untied and sat in a large easy-chair. The aliens then commenced in performing a live strip show for him, taunting and teasing him with every move. He tried to avoid any stimulation on his part, but found he was enjoying himself and even joined in, pressing his face into the large mammaries.

"When I got in there, I found living room furniture," he said.

The escapade continued as Joe and the aliens exited the craft and began writhing on the ground outside his home.

"I didn't know they could pick up rocks with their titties!" he told reporters.

When the fun had ended, the aliens kissed Joe on the cheek, waved good-bys, boarded their ship and departed.

Nacogdoches police questioned Joe about the incident, using advanced techniques and hypnosis. He composed a drawing of the aliens and their craft while under hypnosis, leaving police astonished. The three breasted, strip-teasing aliens have not been seen or heard from since.

"What I fear most," Joe exclaimed in a reflective tone, "is that it was a he, and I was in some guy's asshole!"

How to be Sickening By U.R. Mangey

Are you one of those straight-laced, prim and proper, clean cut, and just plain boring individuals? Are you tired of being that way? Well, if your friends have been calling you a prude, those days are over. In these next few paragraphs, you'll learn that you too can be among the elite in sickening circles!

First of all, let's work on that wardrobe. Throw away those three-piece suits, those alligator polo shirts, those khaki trousers and top-sider shoes, and get yourself down to the nearest land fill (dump). A few hours of rummaging through the piles of garbage should land you a nice new sickening wardrobe, i.e. torn and grubby jeans with a distinct odor, soiled and stained underwear, t-shirts with built in body odor, and old tennis shoes with large holes.

Okay, you've got the threads, now let's work on hygiene. Don't shower ever again. Brushing your teeth is strictly forbidden. Throw away your combs and brushes, and forget about using a bathroom period.

Next, attitude: A truly sickening person doesn't care how they act in public. Belching loud is common place, along with farting and picking your nose. You've also got to learn the walk. It's a sort of bent over slouch with the feet always dragging. An occasional scratch of the genitals is always a nice touch, too.

The language of a sickening person is always very rude with plenty of profanity. Colorful euphemisms are used whenever possible. The subjects a sickening person talks about should be off color and gross. If another person brings up an awful tragedy that has taken place, make a really bad joke about it and laugh loudly at your own remark.

These tips are just a small part of the full spectrum to being sickening, but it's a start. Good luck!

Actual sketches drawn while under hypnosis



Zombies: Keep Your Skin From Decaying

By

D. Edenbereed

Skin decay is on the top of our list as far as personal hygiene is concerned, no matter what the American Dental Association says. In its worst form, (dead skin cells that remain on the body once a corpse has become one of the walking dead) it is horrible to look at, and not pleasant to one's sense of smell. The most traumatic documented cases are those whose skin begins peeling and dropping off. Rotted flesh falling to the floor in putrid, darkened, disgusting pieces. Exposing tough, sinewy muscle and chalky white, chipped and cracked bones.

It's not good.

But those of you who are forced to walk the Earth, eating flesh, and being hunted resulting in your head being blown into tiny bits like zombie kibble, there is now relief for ekin-rot.

Follow these simple steps and find your way to a pleasurable existence. These twelve steps were designed for the dead and should not be tried by the living. And don't go killing yourself with the hopes that you may become one of the walking dead. Remember, conditions must be as shown in Night of the Living Dead, Day of the Dead and Dawn of the Dead. Or, a voo-doo condition, such as the film *Zombie*.

So, all of you walking dead folks out there, get ready for a better existence!

Step #1. Stay out of sun light for a seventy-two hour period.

Step #2. At the end of the seventy-two hours, soak entire body in a warm jacuzzi with baby oil

stirred in, that includes head, (what do you care, you don't need to breathe) for eight hours. This softens the skin, opens pores, and prepares the skin.

Step #3. Do not towel dry after jacuzzi soak. Letting the skin air dry will leave it soft and supple.

Step #4. Mix 1 pint aloe lotion, 1 pint tomato juice (V-8 is okay), 4 oz. pure vegetable oil, 4 oz. Oil of Olay, 2 heaping tbs creamy peanut butter, 1 oz. Oriental Pearl Cream, 1 pint milk, 2 pints human blood, 1 pint ocelot blood, and 2 oz. gerbil blood into a large pot and bring to a boil stirring occasionally. Contents should thin as temperature of mixture rises.

Step #5. While mixture is boiling dip and soak two large sheets. Use tongs, we don't want to damage that prepared skin.

Step #6. Remove sheets (with tongs) and wrap entire body with them while still at their highest temperature. Remain wrapped until sheets completely cool. Do not towel dry.

Step #7. Repeat steps #5 and #6.

Step #8. Repeat step #7.

Step #9. Once wrapping process is complete, immediately immerse entire body into a large tub of ice water for three and a half hours. No more, no less. This will close pores, tightening skin and giving it a healthy glow.

Step #10. Have body completely massaged by a professional masseuse. This will help tone the skin and body.

Step #11. Stay out of sun light for another seventy-two hour period.

Step #12. Drink one gallon of water non-stop.

Repeat this entire procedure every two weeks for the first three months, then once a month after that and you will be amazed at how fantastic you look! So enjoy your great skin and never suffer from rot again! (Procedure has little to no affect on zombies with advanced cases of decay, sorry.)

NECROPHILIA

By

I.M. Assykko

Death is just a transitional phase into another plain of existence... isn't it? Sex is just a temporary transitional phase into another plain of emotion, or maybe it's just the orgasm. The two combined create a whole new plain of reality, especially when it makes no difference if your sex-mate is breathing or not. The type of lover referred to here is: a: not moving or producing any kind of involvement in the act of love making; b: not talking or in fact making any noise at all to indicate that this person may be enjoying (or not) the act of love making; c: kind of limp and livid, like a Cabbage Patch Kid, showing that this person just doesn't care what's happening.

At the risk of sounding perverted, insane, or both, why not just kill this person and carry on with what ever your desire is? Does it really make a difference? Is the sensation any different? Aside from your lover being a little colder, a little bluer and a little stiffer, it's just about the same, isn't it? Yes. If your lover fits into the category of a "dead lay" you won't know the difference. And there are some fringe benefits, like: a: you don't have to talk (unless of course you want to); b: no guilt trips; c: no more jokes about you in bed. Yeah, why not? Your lover probably won't feel, or notice, the difference either.

Lobotomy Quiz

How apt are you to perform a lobotomy? Answer these simple multiple choice questions and find out.

- #1. The surgical tools you use to perform a lobotomy should be:
A. Rusty and dull.
B. Kitchen appliances.
C. Sterile and sharp.

D. All of the above.

#2. A lobotomy should be performed when:

- A. The patient doesn't mind.
- B. The patient is extremely violent and out of control, causing bodily harm to himself and others.
- C. It's most convenient for you.
- D. All of the above.

#3. A lobotomy is:

- A. The surgical detachment of the frontal lobe of the brain.
- B. The surgical detachment of the ear lobe.
- C. The name of a great sea food place in Malibu.
- D. None of the above.

#4. Once a lobotomy is performed, the patient is:

- A. Horny.
- B. A politician.
- C. A vegetable.
- D. All of the above.

#5. If during the operation you need to go to the bathroom, you should:

- A. Hold it by squeezing your legs together and jumping up and down and continue.
- B. Relieve yourself in your pants.
- C. Go to the restroom and continue when you are finished.
- D. All of the above.

#6. Should the patient wake up during the operation you should:

- A. Go to sleep yourself.
- B. Hit them on the head with a large blunt object.
- C. Continue the operation some other time.
- D. Re-administer anesthesia. (Ha, fooled you, huh.)

#7. To perform a lobotomy, you must be:

- A. A licensed physician.
- B. Willing to have one done on yourself.
- C. Drunk.
- D. None of the above.

#8. Einstein's theory of relativity is:

- A. Wrong.

B. E=MC²

C. The notion that one can only perform lobotomies on people they are related to.

D. All of the above.

#9. Some doctors believe a lobotomy is:

- A. A real good thing.
- B. Better when done on an attractive member of the opposite sex so they can have their way with them later.
- C. Archaic and un-necessary.
- D. A great sea food place in Malibu. (Ha, again, huh.)

#10. Steady hands are important when performing a lobotomy because:

- A. I said so.
- B. Shaking can cause accidents and you could cut off the wrong thing.
- C. Steady hands just make you look good.
- D. All of the above.

#11. In the movie "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest", Jack Nicholson had:

- A. A lobotomy done on him at the end of the movie.
- B. A prostate infection.
- C. Been paid a lot of money for doing the role.
- D. All of the above.

#12. Lobotomy is spelled:

- A. La bottom me.
- B. Lob bought a Mee.
- C. Lubaut O'meigh.
- D. None of the above.

#13. In case you are caught performing a lobotomy illegally, you:

- A. Give the police a fake name.
- B. Are basically screwed.
- C. Make the case in point that the doctors in "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" did an illegal lobotomy on Jack Nicholson.
- D. Put back whatever you took out.
- E. All of the above. (Real good one that time, huh.)

Answers to lobotomy quiz will appear in the next issue of I I.

The Big Texas Weed-eater Massacre

By
I. Diditt

During the month of August, 1989, a series of brutal murders took place in the small town of Nacogdoches, Texas. A total of 9,476 victims were found in various states of dismemberment. Among the many victims were: Joe Bob McCaffrey, a small time thief; Wilma Anne Dutton, part time prostitute; Samuel J. Hill, a dirt farmer; and Billy Joe Sue Martin, mortician and mother of 43 children.

The grizzly condition the bodies were found in led coroners to believe the murderer used a gasoline powered weed-eater.

"This guy is one sick fuck." Reported officer Jenkins of the Nacogdoches Police Department. "I could understand a knife or a gun, I even knew a guy got hit in the eye with a sweet tater. But a weed-eater?"

A state wide man hunt was conducted for three and a half hours before police finally gave up the search. Citizens of Nacogdoches were in a state of panic during the weed-eater massacre and seemed to be only concerned with themselves. One Nacogdoches citizen reported: "I was scared shitless. I even went so far as to go out and buy my own weed-eater so the fight would be fair. Mine was electric though. It gave me limited space to work with. He got my wife."

Descriptions given to local police report him to be a tall man, in his early 90's, reddish-orange hair, and walks as though he has a prostate infection. The identification and whereabouts of this mass murderer is to this day unknown. If you see a suspicious looking character wondering your neighborhood with a gasoline powered weed-eater, phone your local police immediately.



Write or call
for details:
Michael J. Autrey,
Book Seller
P.O. Box 510
Whittier, CA 90608
(213) 945-6719

Available Now

© 1990 DOUBLEDAY, INC. BY PERMISSION

**Stephen King's
The Stand
Ltd. Ed.**

A Certain Slant Of "I"



By
S.P. Somtow



Photo: courtesy of Beth Gwinn

Those of you with long, long memories may recall that once upon a time, in the dim recesses of ancient history, there was a magazine named *Fantasy Review*. Edited by the indefatigable Robert Collins, this late-lamented periodical was noted for its dozene of trenchant book reviews, its articles of high-toned academic criticism, its wildly uneven graphics, an occasional piece of quirky fiction, and—yes—this column; *A Certain Slant of "I"*, in which Yours Truly was given carte blanche to discuss any topic under the sun.

Although I talked about many things in my column, from the Freudian subtexts of *E.T.* to the picaresque sex life of my former house-mate, the Redoubtable Timothy Robert Sullivan, from my visits to Parnassus and Pompeii to the relative merits of different brands of garbage bags, the column became best known for its enthusiastic reviews of bad horror movies. It was the first critical vehicle ever to compare Stuart Gordon's *The Re-Animator* favorably with *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, and also the first to note the uncanny resemblance of Linda Blair, in the much-maligned *Hell Night*, to "one of Jim Henson's more porcine creations". It was the first, perhaps the only, column ever to feature a review of Joe D'Amato's *The Grim Reaper* written entirely in limericks, and the first ever to attempt a structural concordance of the labyrinthine plotlines of the *Friday the Thirteenth* movies.

As a result of my increasing infatuation with bad movies, the column became steadily more controversial. Some readers averred that it was the only

thing in the magazine worth reading; others dumped their subscriptions. I was even the object of attack from other columnists in the same magazine—one accused me of writing my diary instead of sublimating my ego to the muse of academic criticism, another proclaimed me a traitor to my race for my endorsement of Fu Manchul! I'm not going to take credit for having caused the demise of *Fantasy Review*, but there are those who would make that claim.

Nevertheless, four years have passed since those halcyon days. No longer am I a penniless writer hammering out a novel every two weeks for a pittance—now I'm a penniless movie mogul hammering on the doors of rich people in Bel Air. When the editors of *Iniquities* offered me the chance of resurrecting the column—no holds barred—I realized that this was a golden opportunity to exorcise my foes, flatter my friends, and wallow once more in the glory ofshit. It was an irresistible deal. And so—for better or worse—I have returned. Here I am.

Now what?

Perhaps I should recapitulate all the events of the last four years...the events that led me from a rented hovel in Virginia to this resplendent manse in a so-so suburb of Los Angeles...a heartwarming, rags-to-eligently-less-disgusting-looking-rags tale of an immigrant from the paddy fields of Siam who, through years of uncomplaining honest hard work managed to claw his way up from being a reasonably revered novelist to being the unreasonably reviled writer-director of a low

budget horror movie....

But I'm sure you'd find all this pretty boring, so lets cut to the chase. A few months ago, I had achieved a new kind of plateau in my career—I was one of the guests of honor at the World Fantasy Convention in Seattle. This was an astounding thing indeed. Virtually everyone who was anyone in the horror field was there (and fantasy, too, though since *Iniquities* is a horror magazine I'll talk mostly about horror writers). Peter Straub was there, proudly clutching the World Fantasy Award for his novel *Koko*. We chatted pleasantly for a while, but when he found out that *A Certain Slant of T* was going to come back, he almost exploded with glee. "At last," he said, "I shall find out what became of the Redoubtable Tim Sullivan's affair with 'Woman C!'"

I couldn't bring myself to tell him that I had stopped trying to catalogue the Redoubtable's women. Ever since etaring in *The Laughing Dead*, my former house-mate has been keeping startlets at bay with a ray-gun and has taken to spending long hours in hiding in my lavatory, where he has worked his way through Bill Warren's encyclopedic guide to science fiction films, *Keep Watching the Skies*, no fewer than 327 times. Now that the Redoubtable's anthology, *Tropical Chills*, has been proclaimed the finest horror anthology of the year by Kingmaker Gardner Dozois, he was also, at the convention sending off dozens of horror writers who wanted to get into his next anthology, *Cold Shocks*.

Who else was there? Robert R. McCammon who delivered a heartfelt eulogy to the power of the human imagination. Harlan Ellison who hid in the kitchen in order to euprise us all by picking up his award in person. Brian Lumley, John Shirley, Edward Bryant, Ray Feist, Paul Wilson and countless other purveyors of horror and dark fantasy were hanging around the bar and the hallways.

Naturally, as one unaccustomed to receiving such eignal honors from World Fantasy Conventions, I had to be very circumspect. In particular, I had to avoid being funny. For years, people had been failing to take my work seriously because I was simply too funny. I don't know why people think I'm funny, but no less a figure than the inimitable Charlie Brown, editor of *LOCUS*, the newspaper of the fantastic genres, who once told me many years ago, that I would have to eschew funniness before people would begin to realize that I was a "real" writer. Now that I was thrust into the company of those who were clearly "real" writers, it would not do to crack too many jokes. I decided that my speech would take a decidedly high tone, and discuss

nothing but the loftiest of themes. I chose for my subject cultural syncretism, an idea that is frequently hurled about by anthropologists. Of course, since everyone at the World Fantasy Awards Banquet was an Exalted Figure, or at least highly-respected within the realm of fantasy, I didn't want to insult anyone's intelligence by defining this arcane anthropological term, and I won't do that here either. Nyah nyah.

My early attempts to achieve cultural syncretism were ill-starred. When I was 13 years old, my parents sent me to a certain prestigious school in England (whose name I can't mention for fear of being stoned to death by my radical friends) where we were all forced to wear tails. I discovered that you could stand outside the walls of Windsor Castle in your tails (conveniently located across the river) and have your photograph taken by the American tourists milling

around outside; you could get away with charging them up to ten ehillings (about \$1.25 in 1966 money) for the privilege. I had seen those same tourists back home in Thailand trampling through the temples and bazars and taking photos of the picturesque peasants. Even though I was a student at the most

exclusive school in the snootiest country in the world I found for the first time, a strange sense of oneness with the peasants of the old country—I too had become picturesque. This perception of the mystical oneness of everyone was a first step toward cultural syncretism, but it was tentative at best.

A more forceful lesson came when I was sent to the seaside town of Eastbourne for the summer vacation, since it was too expensive to have me fly back and forth to Bangkok for every school holiday. As a guest at the boarding house of a certain Mrs. P., I felt wonderfully liberated. What a fine country England was. Here one could do with impunity things that would cause one to be grounded for life at home—things like walking around the house with one's ehoes on and putting one's feet on the table—acts so horrifyingly obscene to a Thai as to be virtually unthinkable. It was only later that I discovered how much social opprobrium could be attached to some eimple, natural action...like, for instance, farting.

The English are not known for their culinary accomplishments, and it was only natural that one day, after having devoured one too many of those rock-solid steak-and-kidney pies—or was it the Spam and eggs?—I fell victim to an attack of gas. The next day I was summoned to Mrs. P.'s boudoir, where the dowager herself held court in a plump floral armchair in front of an electric fire, grimly sipping a cup of tea.

"You made a noise yesterday," Mrs. P. said in

"My early attempts to achieve cultural syncretism were ill-starred"

a tone of shattering outrage.

"A noise?" I had no idea what she could be talking about.

"You know very well what I mean, young man! A noise."

I hemmed and hawed; finally, by a process of elimination, I managed to figure out the identity of the offending sound. "But—I'm afraid I couldn't control myself, Mrs. P.," I said.

"Nonsense! If you make that noise one more time, young man, you're going straight out of this house!"

So overcome was I by the horror of my situation—I was 8,000 miles from home, being raked over the coals for something I did not even know was a crime—that my sphincter involuntarily slipped a notch and expelled another of those nameless noises into the confined recesses of Mrs. P.'s sitting room.

I was dismissed instantly.

I spent the rest of the vacation with my Aunt Gladys, who was a tad hard of hearing and so unable to appreciate my evil oriental ways.

As the years passed I became a little more crafty in my pursuit of cultural syncretism. I graduated from the university and returned to Thailand to pursue what I thought would be a career in music—to become the gadfly of the east, a sort of Harlan Ellison of the Asian avant-garde. All sorts of exciting things happened. For instance, at a huge concert at the opening Asian Composers' Expo 78, attended by dignitaries from around the globe and intended to be a manifesto of—what else?—cultural syncretism, I planned to premiere a large-scale piece of music inspired by a sentence in one of Ursula le Guin's novels. The sentence, for the record, was "I do not care what comes after; I have seen the dragons on the wind of morning." The piece featured an equal number of Thai and Western instruments; I thought it would please all. Little did I know that it would offend various ranking officials of the Department of Fine Arts, a government body under whose provenance fell the preservation of the purity of the nation's culture.

Anyway, the piece featured a large part for a solo piano, which was to be played—with amazing alacrity for someone with only two hands—by the Hong Kong pianist Violet Lam. But on the day of the concert, the piano mysteriously vanished from the auditorium of the National Theater. I stood around, hat in hand, raging for a while; then an official from the department came down and informed me that it had been scientifically determined that music of such uncompromising modernity would damage the strings of the piano, and that the concert would simply have to proceed without it.

Desperately I called around...at last, the West German Embassy came to the rescue, and a piano from the office of the cultural attaché, Dr. Anton Regenborg, was summarily dispatched to the National Theater by way of oxcart.

No...even my most grandiose schemes to bring about cultural syncretism were doomed...until I came to Los Angeles.

At this point in my speech, I hesitated to talk about my visits to the family shaman.

Now those of you who have looked through this issue will notice that there's a short story by the Redoubtable Timothy Robert Sullivan in these pages, and that discusses a visit to a Cambodian shaman. I'll just tell you now that the Redoubtable came with me on several of these visits, and that everything he describes in his story is pretty close to what this enigmatic woman from the old country does.

Nevertheless, I thought I'd tell you some of the things that are not in Tim's story. Bear in mind that, as a rational person of the 90s, I don't really have much truck with the occult—unless it's for one of my horror novels or something. But this is all pretty interesting.

Things weren't going too well with me. My film was in a financial limbo; my publisher's advances had been dropping like flies for my last few books; the local cholos had been spray-painting my wall; and I had been almost crushed by an eighteen-wheeler who tried to back up on Washington D.C.'s notorious Fourteenth Street Bridge, where crash-landing planes frequently slice off the tops of cars and decapitate passersby. I was a nervous wreck and my parents, who were visiting me, said, "Why not go and see the family shaman?"

I told them about how I was a child of the twentieth century, but they weren't buying any of that. "It's traditional," they said. "I'd be bowing to the crypto-fascist sociological pressures of the American lifestyle not to go. Besides, it would be an ideal opportunity to indulge in cultural syncretism."

The magic word! Our shaman, a woman in her sixties who lived in Bangkok but periodically appears in the Los Angeles area to visit her relatives, turned out to be in town that week and so I, the Redoubtable, and many other friends including horror author Wendy Webb (*Women of Darkness* contributor) went down to the Simi Valley house, where many of the events mentioned in Tim Sullivan's story (q.v.) occurred. Our shaman is an aunt of mine (of sorts—the real relationship is simply too complicated to explain); and I'm very anxious to give her a role in my next film, perhaps as herself. After all, if the thing had any possession sequences, she could do all her own stunts.

I wanted to test the shaman's contention that she could become possessed by any god, as long as she held in her hand some token or icon that contained some small shard of that god's soul. I took her an ancient coin of Ptolemy II of Egypt, with an image of Zeus-Ammon on the obverse, and an uhabti (a little clay statuette) from an Egyptian tomb. (Since I can't hear to throw anything away, my house has millennia-old antiquities like this lying around everywhere—remind me to show you the Aztec head I keep under my bed.) The Zeuse image had the most interesting results, especially since as far as I could determine, our sha-

man had never heard of Zeus.

Well she clutched that coin in her palm and in a few seconds she was chimmying and shaking away, in the throes of possession. Suddenly she sat bolt upright and began hurling thunderbolts at us, raising her arms up in a manner reminiscent of the famous statue of Zeus by Pheidias (as described by ancient writers and imitated by second-rate Roman sculptors, for I don't think the original is extant).

"Are you Zeus?" I asked.

She nodded her head vigorously.

"I am full of sexual energy," she mimed. This certainly jibed with what the Redoubtable and I knew of Zeus.

She then told us that Zeus was rather distressed that he wasn't being worshipped much any more, and if it wouldn't be too much trouble would we mind worshipping him and he'd be glad to help us out by vouchsafing us whatever wishes it was in his power to grant.

Our shaman said the above to us all in mime, which was quite a to-do; I was reminded of the time when as a teenager, I had gone to a very snooty party where we ended up playing charades, and I was stuck there trying to interpret "dialectical materialism!"

Theological questions came next, as the shaman, in order to prevent further car accidents, took on the shape of Jesus in order to bless my car with holy water. She carefully explained to me why she was doing this: "Jesus," she said, "is the head god in charge of these parts, you see, and while I specialize in becoming possessed by the Hindu-Buddhist gods like Brahma

and so on, here in America I sometimes feel I'm not on my own turf, and so I have to invoke the local deities instead."

Invoking the local deity turned out to be quite a spectacle indeed. Our shaman meditated for a while, and then flung out her arms in what appeared to be a crucified pose, writhing in agony. This Jesus was clearly no milquetoast mouthing benign platitudes. In fact, it tended toward a more Catholic interpretation (judging from a layman's point of view) with an interesting admixture of eadomasochism such as is found in some Central American and Filipino traditions.

After Jesus had calmed down a little, the Redoubtable decided it was time to have the deity resolve some questions of dogma that had, it seemed, been troubling him for some time. One must realize that the Redoubtable is a lapsed Catholic—he was the only boy

in his entire junior high who did not become an altar boy, so his lapsing began at the tender age of ten or eleven; wrestling with questions of faith is *de rigueur* for him in those odd moments when he happens not to be pursuing some woman.

The Redoubtable asked the shaman, "Why do you insist that people

worship no other gods but yourself? Isn't this a little...well...solipsistic of you?"

Jesus pointed a finger at himself, then held it up in the air to form the number one. He smiled a wry smile.

How elegantly this little old lady had answered one of the conundra that have plagued philosophers and theosophists for thousands of years!

Then it was on to the business of the day—how

"The moment of truth
had arrived in
my speech."



Photo: courtesy of Beth Givern

to exert more influence on my publishers so that they would do what I want—give me bigger advances, print more copies or my books, and so on. Our family shaman got me to write the names of everyone in the publishing business who might have anything to do with my books, seven times on a piece of paper. I then wrote my own name—in much larger print—seven times across the sheet, being careful to obliterate every bit of the names of the people I wanted to control.

It was time to call down Brahma himself—the creator of the universe—the one with all those arms and legs and heads. (This was the night of the bloody lunar eclipse so hauntingly described by the Redoubtable in his short story.) Our shaman went into wild paroxysms and cure enough, she soon seemed to be all arms and legs as she seized the paper from my hand folded it over and over, hound it with a *saisin*, or magical cord, pulled down streams of invisible lustral water from the sky, and mummed incantations. At the conclusion of the ceremony, she handed me the fetish and said, "Now, every time you want your publishers to do something, just take out this device and gently tap on it, while calling out the name of your intended victim..."

The moment of truth had arrived in my speech. You see, sympathetic magic is all very well, but I wanted to make sure the thing worked by actually demonstrating it in front of the publishers themselves. If they know magic is being practiced on them, I reasoned, they'd be much more susceptible to it.

I pulled out the fetish in front of the assembled throng. I began to tap on it, calling out the names of such publishing luminaries as Tom Doherty, David Hartwell and John Douglas. Sure enough, they began to writhe, quake and convulse—though I could not quite figure out whether it was with agony or laughter.

"This anguish can end!" I cried out. "I will gladly sell this fetish to the highest bidder...and I'll even throw in a novel or two!"

I'm still waiting to see whether they'll take the bait.

So here I am, sitting in my miserable garret in the city of broken dreams. I've directed a New Age Mayan Exorcist Slasher film, I've "done lunch" several times this week, and I've unleashed the powers of pagan gods on my unsuspecting publishers.

A few months ago I decided to go the whole hog. I put up a shrine in my house with images of all these deities; I've a pile of fetishes that I sit around tapping all day long, and once a week I leave food out for the divine ones to snack on. And once a month I go down to Bel Air, where a friend of mine (who lives down the hill from the Reagan's) gets me giga reading tarot cards for bored rich women; one of these days, I imagine, one of them will get around to financing my next picture.

Of course, I'm a child of the twentieth century and I really don't believe a word of it. Just ask my astrologer. It's just a matter of protective camouflage.

Or, as New Age book editor Hank Stine so trenchantly puts it, "adapting to the California lifestyle."

THE CENSOR



Read what he wants to
keep you from reading
in GAUNTLET
a new magazine making waves

Thought-provoking, outrageous, entertaining. Not dry or academic. GAUNTLET: Exploring the Limits of Free Expression will include censored work of Harlan Ellison ("Nackles"), Ray Garton ("Crucifix Autumn"), artist Robert Williams, and George Carlin.

Plus, original fiction by

Bill Relling, Steve Rasnic Tem, Wayne Alan Sallee, Yvonne Navarro, William F. Nolan, Graham Masterton, and Rick Hautala.

Plus, original commentary by

Chel Williamson, Jeannette Hopper, Kevin J. Anderson, Ramsey Campbell, Rex Miller, Bill Munster, Gary Brandner, and Dan Simmons.

Plus,

Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Douglas Winter, Andres Serrano, and more. All sides presented. We won't censor the censors.

Subscribe now!

Target publication date March 1990. Published yearly. Just clip or photocopy the coupon below and send it in with your check.

YES, I'm interested in free expression. I'd like to subscribe for (check one):

- ☐ 1 year at \$7.95 (\$8.95 after publication)
- ☐ 2 years at \$15
- ☐ 3 years at \$21

I'm enclosing a check made out to GAUNTLET/Barry Hoffman. I'm mailing it and this coupon (or photocopy) to GAUNTLET/Barry Hoffman, Dept. I, 309 Powell Rd., Springfield, PA 19064.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

A P O C A L Y P S O

MIDNIGHT GRAFFITI #6
FALL 1990

F E A T U R I N G

DAN SIMMONS

NEIL GAIMAN

S.P. SOMETOW

CRYOGENOCIDE

AND OTHER SURVIVORS

80 PAGES \$4.95 ON SALE SEPT.

OR WRITE:

MIDNIGHT GRAFFITI

13101 SUDAN ROAD

POWAY, CALIFORNIA 92064

A LIGHTER LOOK AT ARMAGEDDON

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$19.95 1 YEAR

COME MEET THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

NIGHT BREED



Enter a netherworld of darkness and terror as horror maven Clive Barker takes you on an unforgettable journey to fear... and back! Welcome to *Nightbreed*.

Now Available On Videocassette!



DISTRIBUTED BY MCA HOME ENTERTAINMENT, INC. A Home Communications, Inc. Company Los Angeles, California

